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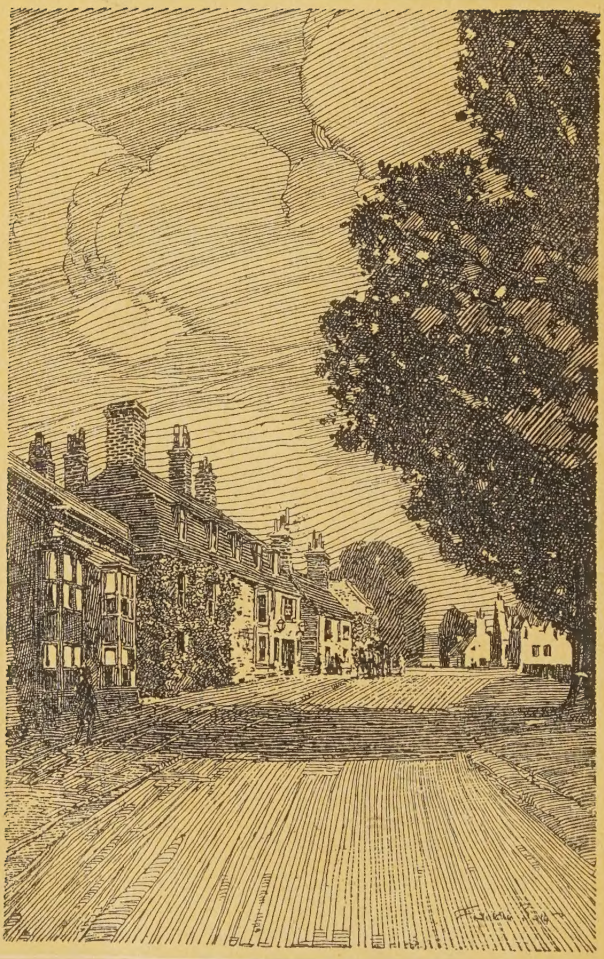
VIEW OF RYE, SUSSEX, ENGLAND,
WHERE HENRY JAMES LIVED



THE HARVARD CLASSICS
SHELF OF FICTION
SELECTED BY CHARLES W ELIOT LL D

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

BY
HENRY JAMES JR

EDITED WITH NOTES AND INTRODUCTIONS
BY WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON PH D

P F COLLIER & SON COMPANY
NEW YORK

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

THOUGH Henry James lived to the age of seventy-three, and though his literary career covered half a century, the story of his external life can be told in a few sentences. He was born in New York on April 15, 1843, the son of Henry James, a Swedenborgian minister who wrote on theology with an originality and in a style which go far to explain the source of the most remarkable characteristics of both the novelist and of his elder brother William, the psychologist and philosopher. Henry James, Jr., has given in "A Small Boy and Others," if not a chronicle, at least a series of pictures of persons and places, and still more of the atmospheres of persons and places, that impressed his youthful imagination and stayed in his memory till old age. The family, we gather, was in race a mixture of Irish, Scottish, and English, and had been established at Albany, where Henry spent part of his boyhood. His youth was a wandering one, with "small vague spasms of school," but with abundance of educative and imaginatively stimulating associations and experiences, first in New York, then in London, Paris, and Geneva. At seventeen he returned to America and entered the Harvard Law School, but soon gave up the law for literature. He published his first story in the "Atlantic Monthly" in 1865, and four years later went back to Europe. His home for the rest of his life was in England, in London or at Rye in Sussex, though he made occasional visits to the Continent and to America. When the war broke out in 1914 he took an active interest in the relief of the Belgian refugees, and he testified to his allegiance to the cause of the country in which he had spent the greater part of his life by becoming a citizen of Britain. On February 28, 1916, he died in London.

Though Henry James's reputation rests chiefly on his fiction, he was a critic of exquisite taste and rare delicacy of expression. Among the most important of his writings in

this field are "French Poets and Novelists" (1878), "Life of Hawthorne" (1879), "Partial Portraits" (1888), and "The Lesson of Balzac" (1905). His gift for conveying the special flavor and distinction of places found expression in several volumes of impressions of travel, such as "Portraits of Places" (1884), "A Little Tour in France" (1884), and "The American Scene" (1906).

His more important fiction began with "Watch and Ward" (1871), "A Passionate Pilgrim" (1875)—one of the best of his shorter stories, "Roderick Hudson" (1875), and "The American" (1877). He reached the larger public in 1878 with "Daisy Miller," and from this date he was justly regarded as the most successful interpreter of American character from the cosmopolitan point of view. "The Portrait of a Lady" appeared in 1881 when he was at the height of his powers, and, as much as any of his books, is agreed upon as his masterpiece. As time went on James's prose became more and more intricate and allusive, and though such later works as "The Wings of the Dove" (1902), "The Ambassadors" (1903), and "The Golden Bowl" (1904) show an increase rather than a falling off in his power of subtle analysis and his feeling for the individual quality of people and of social groups, many of his readers were estranged by the difficulty of the style, and his vogue remained limited.

Henry James was the most conscientious of artists. His motive for writing lay in the impulse to represent those things in life that roused his own interest and curiosity, and to such representation he confined himself, making no concession to "what the public wants." Thus we must take him on his own terms or not at all. But if we do take him on his own terms, we are rewarded by a unique rendering of human motive and behavior in a series of the most interesting predicaments, a rendering which yields an intense intellectual pleasure and not infrequently touches even tragic depths. And his instrument of expression, however involved it may later have become, is seen in such a book as "The Portrait of a Lady" to be unsurpassed in its power of portraying those subtleties and refinements of mood and character for which the author had an eye keen beyond that of any of his rivals in English.

W. A. N.

CRITICISMS AND INTERPRETATIONS

I

By William Dean Howells

IF we take him at all we must take him on his own ground, for clearly he will not come to ours. We must make concessions to him, not in this respect only, but in several others, chief among which is the motive for reading fiction. By example, at least, he teaches that it is the pursuit and not the end which should give us pleasure; for he often prefers to leave us to our own conjectures in regard to the fate of the people in whom he has interested us. There is no question, of course, but he could tell the story of Isabel in "The Portrait of a Lady" to the end, yet he does not tell it. We must agree, then, to take what seems a fragment instead of a whole, and to find, when we can, a name for this new kind in fiction. Evidently it is the character, not the fate, of his people which occupies him; when he has fully developed their character he leaves them to what destiny the reader pleases.

The analytic tendency seems to have increased with him as his work has gone on. Some of the earlier tales were very dramatic: "A Passionate Pilgrim," which I should rank above all his other short stories, and for certain rich poetical qualities, above everything else that he has done, is eminently dramatic. But I do not find much that I should call dramatic in "The Portrait of a Lady," while I do find in it an amount of analysis which I should call superabundance if it were not all such good literature. The novelist's main business is to possess his reader with a due conception of his characters and the situations in which they find themselves. If he does more or less than this he equally fails. I have sometimes thought that Mr. James's danger was to do more, but when I have been ready to declare this excess an error of his method I have hesitated. Could any-

thing be superfluous that had given me so much pleasure as I read? Certainly from only one point of view, and this is a rather narrow, technical one. It seems to me that an enlightened criticism will recognize in Mr. James's fiction a metaphysical genius working to æsthetic results, and will not be disposed to deny it any method it chooses to employ. No other novelist, except George Eliot, has dealt so largely in analysis of motive, has so fully explained and commented upon the springs of action in the persons of the drama, both before and after the facts. These novelists are more alike than any others in their processes, but with George Eliot an ethical purpose is dominant, and with Mr. James an artistic purpose. I do not know just how it should be stated of two such noble and generous types of character as Dorothea and Isabel Archer, but I think that we sympathize with the former in grand aims that chiefly concern others, and with the latter in beautiful dreams that primarily concern herself. Both are unselfish and devoted women, sublimely true to a mistaken ideal in their marriages; but, though they come to this common martyrdom, the original difference in them remains. Isabel has her great weaknesses, as Dorothea had; but these seem to me, on the whole, the most nobly imagined and the most nobly intentioned women in modern fiction; and I think Isabel is the more subtly divined of the two. If we speak of mere characterization, we must not fail to acknowledge the perfection of Gilbert Osmond. It was a profound stroke to make him an American by birth. No European could realize so fully in his own life the ideal of a European *dilettante* in all the meaning of that cheapened word; as no European could so deeply and tenderly feel the sweetness and loveliness of the English past as the sick American, Searle, in "The Passionate Pilgrim."—From "Henry James, Jr.," in "The Century Magazine" (November, 1882).

II

IT has long been evident that Mr. James's powers of observation are not only remarkably keen, but sleepless as well. But "The Portrait of a Lady" would not be what it is if it did not possess a *fond* of moral seriousness, in addition to and underlying its extraordinary interest of purely intellectual curiosity. There is a specific lesson for the American girl in the first place; there are others, more general, which accompany every imaginative work of large importance. That these are nowhere distinctly stated is now nothing new in fiction even of a distinctly moral purpose. But Mr. James has carried suggestiveness in this regard further than any rival novelist, and though, unless one has ears to hear, it is entirely possible to miss the undertone of his book, to an appreciative sense there is something exquisite in the refinement with which it is conveyed. Refinement in this respect cannot be carried too far. In strictly literary matters Mr. James's fastidiousness may be objected to, perhaps, if one chooses; he has carried the method of the essayist into the domain of romance: its light touch, its reliance on suggestiveness, its weakness for indirect statement, its flattering presupposition of the reader's perceptiveness, its low tones, its polish. Upon occasion, where the circumstances really seem to warrant a little fervor, you only get from the author of "The Portrait of a Lady" irreproachability. Objection to this may easily be carried too far, however; and those who do thus carry it too far, and argue that no people ever spoke and acted with the elegance and precision of the personages here portrayed, must of necessity pay the penalty of ultra-literalness and miss the secret of Mr. James's success. To characterize this secret with adequate fulness would require far more than the space at our disposal; but it may be sufficiently indicated by calling it the imaginative treatment of reality. In this unquestionably lies Mr. James's truly original excellence. "The Portrait of a Lady" is the most original example we have thus far had of realistic art in fiction *à outrance*, because its substance is thoroughly, and at times profoundly, real, and at the same

time its presentation is imaginative. On the one hand, wilfulness and fantasticality are avoided, and on the other, prose and flatness. One may even go further, and say that the book succeeds in the difficult problem of combining a scientific value with romantic interest and artistic merit.—From a review in "The Nation" (February 2, 1882).

III

By W. C. Brownell

THE list of Mr. James's novels is a long one, and his short stories are very numerous; and among them all there is not one with a perfunctory or desultory inspiration. Why is it that they in no sense constitute a *comédie humaine?* They are very populous; why is it that the characters that people them have so little relief? Taken together they constitute the least successful element of his fiction. Partly this is because, as I say, they possess so little typical quality. But why also do they possess so little personal interest? They have, seemingly, astonishingly little, even for their creator. So far from knowing the sound of their voices, as Thackeray said of his, he is apparently less pre-occupied with them than about the situation—the "predicament," he would aptly say—in which he places them. Apparently he is chiefly concerned with what they are to do when confronted with the complications his ingenuity devises for them—how they are to "pull it off." These complications are sometimes very slight, in order to show, or at least showing, what trifles control destinies; sometimes they are very grave, and exhibit the conflict of the soul with warring desires and distracting perplexities. And they are never commonplace—any more than the characters themselves, each one of which is intimately observed and thoroughly respected as an individuality. But their situation rather than themselves is what constitutes the claim, the *raison d'être*, of the book in which they figure. The interest in the book, accordingly, becomes analogous to that of a game in which the outcome rather than the pieces monopolizes the

attention. It cannot be said that the pieces are not attentively described—some of them, indeed, are very artistically and even beautifully carved—but it is the moves that count most of all. Will Densher give a plausible solution to the recondite problem of how to combine the qualities of a cad and of a gentleman? Will Maisie decide for or against Sir Claude? What decision will Sir Claude himself make? Has Vanderbank ideality enough to marry Nanda? Will Chad Newsome go back to Woollett? The game is very well, often exquisitely, played; and the result, which, nevertheless, from all we know of the characters, we can rarely foresee, wears —when we argue it out in retrospect as the author clearly has done in advance—the proper artistic aspect of a foregone conclusion. Mr. James rarely seems to impose it himself; except on the few occasions when, as in "The Princess Casamassima" or "The Other House," he deals in melodrama, in which he almost never succeeds in being convincing, his rectitude is so strong a reliance as to exclude all impression of perversity or wilfulness and convey the agreeable sense of sufficiently fatalistic predestination. Meantime you find out about the characters from the result. Since it has turned out in this way, they must have been such and such persons. In other words, they have not been characterized very vividly, have not been presented very completely as human beings.

At least they do not people one's memory, I think, as the personages of many inferior artists do. When one thinks of the number of characters that Mr. James has created, each, as I have said, carefully individualized, and none of them replicas—an amazing world they certainly compose in their originality and variety—it is odd what an effort it is to recall even their names. The immortal Daisy Miller, the sensitive and highly organized Ralph Touchett, the robust and thoroughly national Christopher Newman, the gentle Miss Pynsent, and a number of others that do remain in one's memory, mainly belong to the earlier novels and form but a small proportion of the great number of their author's creations. Different readers, however, would no doubt answer this rather crude test differently, and in any case it is not because they fail in precision that Mr. James's personages lose distinctness as their story, like all stories, fades from the recol-

lection. They have a sharp enough outline, but they are not completely enough characterized.

Why? Why is it that when the American heroine of one of his stories, beautifully elaborated in detail, a perfect specimen of Dutch *intarsia,* kills herself because her English husband publishes a savage book about her country, we find ourselves perfectly unprepared for this *dénouement?* Why is it that with all the pains expended on the portrait of the extraordinary Mrs. Headway of "The Siege of London," we never quite get *his* point of view, but are kept considering the social duty of the prig who passes his valuable time in observing her attempts at rehabilitation and—no doubt most justly—exposes her in the end? There is nothing to complain of in the result, the problem is worked out satisfactorily enough, but Mrs. Headway herself does not count for us, does not hang together, in the way in which Augier's Aventurière does, or even Dumas's Baronne d'Ange. It would be difficult, for example, for this reason, to make a play of "The Siege of London."

The answer to this query, the explanation of this incompleteness of characterization in Mr. James's nevertheless very precise personages, consists, I think, in the fact that he rather pointedly neglects the province of the heart. This has been from the first the natural peril of the psychological novelist, the neglect of what in the Scripture view constitutes "the whole man," just as the neglect of the mind—which discriminates and defines personalities once constituted—was the defect of the psychological novelist's predecessor. But for Mr. James this peril has manifestly no terrors. The province of the heart seems to him, perhaps, so much to be taken for granted as to be on the whole rather negligible, so far as romantic exploitation is concerned.

Incidentally, one may ask, if all the finest things in the world are to be assumed, what is there left for exploitation? Matter for curiosity mainly—the curiosity which in Mr. James is so sharp and so fruitful. The realm of the affections is that which—*ex vi termini,* one may say—most engages and attaches. Are we to be interested in fiction without liking it? And are we to savor art without experiencing emotion? The fact that few reread Mr. James means that

his form, however adequate and effective, is not in itself agreeable. But it means still more that his "content" is not attaching. When Lockhart once made some remark to Scott about poets and novelists looking at life as mere material for art, the "veteran Chief of Letters" observed: "I fear you have some very young ideas in your head. We shall never learn to feel and respect our real calling, unless we have taught ourselves to consider everything as moonshine compared with the education of the heart." Is it possible that Mr. James's controlling idea is a "young one"? Is his undoubted originality, after all, the exploitation of what seemed to so wise a practitioner as Scott, "moonshine"? That would account, perhaps, for the pallid light that often fills his canvas when his characters are grouped in a scene where "the human heart"—insight into which used to be deemed the standard of the novelist's excellence—has a part of any prominence to play. The voluntary abandonment by the novelist of such a field of interest as the province of the heart is witness, at all events, of an asceticism whose compensations ought in prudence to be thoroughly assured. Implied, understood—this domain! Very well, one may reply, but what a field of universal interest you neglect, what a rigorously puritanic sacrifice you make! . . .

He has, however, chosen to be an original writer in a way that precludes him from being, as a writer, a great one. Just as his theory of art prevents his more important fiction from being a rounded and synthetic image of life seen from a certain centralizing point of view, and makes of it an essay at conveying the sense and illusion of life by following, instead of focussing, its phenomena, so his theory of style prevents him from creating a texture of expression with any independent interest of its own. The interest of his expression consists solely in its correspondence to the character of what it endeavors to express. So concentrated upon this end is he that he very rarely gives scope to the talent for beautiful and effective expression which occasional lapses from his rigorous practice show him to possess in a distinguished degree. There are entire volumes of his writings that do not contain a sentence like, for example, this from a brief essay on Hawthorne: "His beautiful and light

imagination is the wing that on the autumn evening just brushes the dusky pane." Of a writer who has this touch, this capacity, in his equipment, it is justifiable to lament that his theory of art has so largely prevented his exercise of it. The fact that his practice has not atrophied the faculty—clear enough from a rare but perfect exhibition of it from time to time—only increases our regret. We do not ask of Mr. James's fastidiousness the purple patch of poetic prose, any more than we expect from him any kind of mediocrity whatever. But when a writer, who shows us unmistakably now and then that he could give us frequent equivalents of such episodes as the death of Ralph Touchett, rigorously refrains through a long series of admirable books from producing anything of greater extent than a sentence or a paragraph that can be called classic, that has the classic "note," we may, I think, legitimately complain that his theory of art is exasperatingly exacting.—From "American Prose Masters" (1909).

IV

By R. A. Scott

AND so again, if we take a modern author of a very different type, such a one as Henry James, whose concern it is to state life, with a view to throwing into relief the finer shades, we shall observe that most of his work is characterised by a kind of *intensive* culture, as opposed to that *extensive* method which, through lack of form, was abused in Dickens, and through obedience to form was satisfactorily applied by the poet Swinburne at his best. We may safely say that when Swinburne was at his best, when he was "himself," his world was a world of rhythmical energy, of impetuous freedom and sensuous activity which, translated into poetry, was expressed through the symbols of love and sea-foam and battle; to be true to the genius which was central to himself, he required no pregnancy or subtle suggestiveness of phrase; he needed no more than rhyme, rhythm, and onomatopœic words, and with these he gave all he had to give—the sense of energy remembered, the sensu-

ous delight of physical activity, a world of divinely glorified sensation. Mature readers do not seek him often, for there are only a few moods which he can satisfy. A writer such as Mr. Henry James stands at the exactly opposite pole. It is the proper business of such a man as Swinburne merely to affirm sensation, and he could do it perfectly. It is the proper business of Mr. James, not to affirm sensation or any experience—he could not do it with sincerity—but to question sensation, to question emotion and sentiment; it is his proper business to examine experience with the amused, searching gaze of one who expects the unexpected. It is his business to make experience interesting, not, like Swinburne, by multiplication, but rather by division—by the method of the microscope, which reveals in a fly's wing some unsuspected fineness of pattern and variegated brilliance of colour. He himself is fond of the word "curiosity"; it defines something that is central to his personality; this, brought into activity by the "representational impulse" (which in his opinion is the one justification for the artist), takes form in the intricate and delicately woven patterns of human temperament which are the objects of his curiosity.—From "Literature as a Fine Art," in "The English Review" (April, 1913).

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Mr. Touchett, an American who has lived in England for many years, head of a banking house in London.

Mrs. Touchett, his wife.

Ralph Touchett, his son.

Isabel Archer, "The Lady," niece of Mrs. Touchett.

Lord Warburton, a fine specimen of a liberal English peer, friend of Ralph Touchett.

Henrietta Stackpole, American friend of Isabel Archer, and a young lady journalist.

Mr. Bantling, Miss Stackpole's English conquest.

Casper Goodwood, of Boston, Mass. A young man of determination.

Madam Merle, friend of Mrs. Touchett, a woman of the world.

Gilbert Osmond, an American gentleman living in retirement in Florence.

Pansy Osmond, his daughter.

Edward Rosier, of the American colony in Paris.

Several incidental characters, relatives of Lord Warburton and Isabel Archer, two Sisters of Charity, etc., etc.

THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY

CHAPTER I

UNDER certain circumstances there are few hours in life more agreeable than the hour dedicated to the ceremony known as afternoon tea. There are circumstances in which, whether you partake of the tea or not —some people of course never do—the situation is in itself delightful. Those that I have in mind in beginning to unfold this simple history offered an admirable setting to an innocent pastime. The implements of the little feast had been disposed upon the lawn of an old English country-house, in what I should call the perfect middle of a splendid summer afternoon. Part of the afternoon had waned, but much of it was left, and what was left was of the finest and rarest quality. Real dusk would not arrive for many hours; but the flood of summer light had begun to ebb, the air had grown mellow, the shadows were long upon the smooth, dense turf. They lengthened slowly, however, and the scene expressed that sense of leisure still to come which is perhaps the chief source of one's enjoyment of such a scene at such an hour. From five o'clock to eight is on certain occasions a little eternity; but on such an occasion as this the interval could be only an eternity of pleasure. The persons concerned in it were taking their pleasure quietly, and they were not of the sex which is supposed to furnish the regular votaries of the ceremony I have mentioned. The shadows on the perfect lawn were straight and angular; they were the shadows of an old man sitting in a deep wickerchair near the low table on which the tea had been served, and of two younger men strolling to and fro, in desultory talk, in front of him. The old man had his cup in his hand; it was an unusually large cup, of a different pattern from the rest of the set, and painted in brilliant colours. He disposed of

its contents with much circumspection, holding it for a long time close to his chin, with his face turned to the house. His companions had either finished their tea or were indifferent to their privilege; they smoked cigarettes as they continued to stroll. One of them, from time to time, as he passed, looked with a certain attention at the elder man, who, unconscious of observation, rested his eyes upon the rich red front of his dwelling. The house that rose beyond the lawn was a structure to repay such consideration, and was the most characteristic object in the peculiarly English picture I have attempted to sketch.

It stood upon a low hill, above the river—the river being the Thames, at some forty miles from London. A long gabled front of red brick, with the complexion of which time and the weather had played all sorts of picturesque tricks, only, however, to improve and refine it, presented itself to the lawn, with its patches of ivy, its clustered chimneys, its windows smothered in creepers. The house had a name and a history; the old gentleman taking his tea would have been delighted to tell you these things: how it had been built under Edward the Sixth, had offered a night's hospitality to the great Elizabeth (whose august person had extended itself upon a huge, magnificent, and terribly angular bed which still formed the principal honour of the sleeping apartments), had been a good deal bruised and defaced in Cromwell's wars, and then, under the Restoration, repaired and much enlarged; and how, finally, after having been remodelled and disfigured in the eighteenth century, it had passed into the careful keeping of a shrewd American banker, who had bought it originally because (owing to circumstances too complicated to set forth) it was offered at a great bargain; bought it with much grumbling at its ugliness, its antiquity, its incommodity, and who now, at the end of twenty years, had become conscious of a real æsthetic passion for it, so that he knew all its points, and would tell you just where to stand to see them in combination, and just the hour when the shadows of its various protuberances—which fell so softly upon the warm, weary brickwork—were of the right measure. Besides this, as I have said, he could have counted off most of the successive owners

and occupants, several of whom were known to general fame; doing so, however, with an undemonstrative conviction that the latest phase of its destiny was not the least honourable. The front of the house overlooking that portion of the lawn with which we are concerned, was not the entrance-front; this was in quite another quarter. Privacy here reigned supreme, and the wide carpet of turf that covered the level hill-top seemed but the extension of a luxurious interior. The great still oaks and beeches flung down a shade as dense as that of velvet curtains; and the place was furnished, like a room, with cushioned seats with rich-coloured rugs, with the books and papers that lay upon the grass. The river was at some distance; where the ground began to slope, the lawn, properly speaking, ceased. But it was none the less a charming walk down to the water.

The old gentleman at the tea-table, who had come from America thirty years before, had brought with him, at the top of his baggage, his American physiognomy; and he had not only brought it with him, but he had kept it in the best order, so that, if necessary, he might have taken it back to his own country with perfect confidence. But at present, obviously, he was not likely to displace himself; his journeys were over, and he was taking the rest that precedes the great rest. He had a narrow, clean-shaven face, with evenly distributed features, and an expression of placid acuteness. It was evidently a face in which the range of expression was not large; so that the air of contented shrewdness was all the more of a merit. It seemed to tell that he had been successful in life, but it seemed to tell also that his success had not been exclusive and invidious, but had had much of the inoffensiveness of failure. He had certainly had a great experience of men; but there was an almost rustic simplicity in the faint smile that played upon his lean, spacious cheek, and lighted up his humorous eye, as he at last slowly and carefully deposited his big tea-cup upon the table. He was neatly dressed, in well-brushed black; but a shawl was folded upon his knees, and his feet were encased in thick, embroidered slippers. A beautiful collie dog lay upon the grass near his chair, watching the master's face almost as tenderly as the master contemplated

the still more magisterial physiognomy of the house; and a little bristling, bustling terrier bestowed a desultory attendance upon the other gentlemen.

One of these was a remarkably well-made man of five-and-thirty, with a face as English as that of the old gentleman I have just sketched was something else; a noticeably handsome face, fresh-coloured, fair, and frank, with firm, straight features, a lively grey eye, and the rich adornment of a chestnut beard. This person had a certain fortunate, brilliant exceptional look—the air of a happy temperament fertilised by a high civilisation—which would have made almost any observer envy him at a venture. He was booted and spurred, as if he had dismounted from a long ride; he wore a white hat, which looked too large for him; he held his two hands behind him, and in one of them—a large, white, well-shaped fist—was crumpled a pair of soiled dog-skin gloves.

His companion, measuring the length of the lawn beside him, was a person of quite another pattern, who, although he might have excited grave curiosity, would not, like the other, have provoked you to wish yourself, almost blindly, in his place. Tall, lean, loosely and feebly put together, he had an ugly, sickly, witty, charming face—furnished, but by no means decorated, with a straggling moustache and whisker. He looked clever and ill—a combination by no means felicitous; and he wore a brown velvet jacket. He carried his hands in his pockets, and there was something in the way he did it that showed the habit was inveterate. His gait had a shambling, wandering quality; he was not very firm on his legs. As I have said, whenever he passed the old man in the chair, he rested his eyes upon him; and at this moment, with their faces brought into relation, you would easily have seen that they were father and son.

The father caught his son's eye at last, and gave him a mild, responsive smile.

"I am getting on very well," he said.

"Have you drunk you tea?" asked the son.

"Yes, and enjoyed it."

"Shall I give you some more?"

The old man considered, placidly.

"Well, I guess I will wait and see."

He had, in speaking, the American tone.

"Are you cold?" his son inquired.

The father slowly rubbed his legs.

"Well, I don't know. I can't tell till I feel."

"Perhaps some one might feel for you," said the younger man, laughing.

"Oh, I hope some one will always feel for me! Don't you feel for me, Lord Warburton?"

"Oh yes, immensely," said the gentleman addressed as Lord Warburton, promptly. "I am bound to say you look wonderfully comfortable."

"Well, I suppose I am, in most respects." And the old man looked down at his green shawl, and smoothed it over his knees. "The fact is, I have been comfortable so many years that I suppose I have got so used to it I don't know it."

"Yes, that's the bore of comfort," said Lord Warburton. "We only know when we are uncomfortable."

"It strikes me that we are rather particular," said his companion.

"Oh yes, there is no doubt we're particular," Lord Warburton murmured.

And then the three men remained silent a while; the two younger ones standing looking down at the other, who presently asked for more tea.

"I should think you would be very unhappy with that shawl," said Lord Warburton, while his companion filled the old man's cup again.

"Oh no, he must have the shawl!" cried the gentleman in the velvet coat. "Don't put such ideas as that into his head."

"It belongs to my wife," said the old man, simply.

"Oh, if it's for sentimental reasons——" And Lord Warburton made a gesture of apology.

"I suppose I must give it to her when she comes," the old man went on.

"You will please to do nothing of the kind. You will keep it to cover your poor old legs."

"Well, you mustn't abuse my legs," said the old man. "I guess they are as good as yours."

"Oh, you are perfectly free to abuse mine," his son replied, giving him his tea.

"Well, we are two lame ducks; I don't think there is much difference."

"I am much obliged to you for calling me a duck. How is your tea?"

"Well, it's rather hot."

"That's intended to be a merit."

"Ah, there's a great deal of merit," murmured the old man, kindly. "He's a very good nurse, Lord Warburton."

"Isn't he a bit clumsy?" asked his lordship.

"Oh no, he's not clumsy—considering that he's an invalid himself. He's a very good nurse—for a sick-nurse. I call him my sick-nurse because he's sick himself."

"Oh, come, daddy!" the ugly young man exclaimed.

"Well, you are; I wish you weren't. But I suppose you can't help it."

"I might try: that's an idea," said the young man.

"Were you ever sick, Lord Warburton?" his father asked.

Lord Warburton considered a moment.

"Yes, sir, once, in the Persian Gulf."

"He is making light of you, daddy," said the other young man. "That's a sort of joke."

"Well, there seem to be so many sorts now," daddy replied, serenely. "You don't look as if you had been sick, any way, Lord Warburton."

"He is sick of life; he was just telling me so; going on fearfully about it," said Lord Warburton's friend.

"Is that true, sir?" asked the old man gravely.

"If it is, your son gave me no consolation. He's a wretched fellow to talk to—a regular cynic. He doesn't seem to believe anything."

"That's another sort of joke," said the person accused of cynicism.

"It's because his health is so poor," his father explained to Lord Warburton. "It affects his mind, and colours his way of looking at things; he seems to feel as if he had never had a chance. But it's almost entirely theoretical, you know; it doesn't seem to affect his spirits. I have hardly ever seen

him when he wasn't cheerful—about as he is at present. He often cheers me up."

The young man so described looked at Lord Warburton and laughed.

"Is it a glowing eulogy or an accusation of levity? Should you like me to carry out my theories, daddy?"

"By Jove, we should see some queer things!" cried Lord Warburton.

"I hope you haven't taken up that sort of tone," said the old man.

"Warburton's tone is worse than mine; he pretends to be bored. I am not in the least bored; I find life only too interesting."

"Ah, *too* interesting; you shouldn't allow it to be that, you know!"

"I am never bored when I come here," said Lord Warburton. "One gets such uncommonly good talk."

"Is that another sort of joke?" asked the old man. "You have no excuse for being bored anywhere. When I was your age, I had never heard of such a thing."

"You must have developed very late."

"No, I developed very quick; that was just the reason. When I was twenty years old, I was very highly developed indeed. I was working, tooth and nail. You wouldn't be bored if you had something to do; but all you young men are too idle. You think too much of your pleasure. You are too fastidious, and too indolent, and too rich."

"Oh, I say," cried Lord Warburton, "you're hardly the person to accuse a fellow-creature of being too rich!"

"Do you mean because I am a banker?" asked the old man.

"Because of that, if you like; and because you are so ridiculously wealthy."

"He isn't very rich," said the other young man, indicating his father. "He has given away an immense deal of money."

"Well, I suppose it was his own," said Lord Warburton; "and in that case could there be a better proof of wealth? Let not a public benefactor talk of one's being too fond of pleasure."

"Daddy is very fond of pleasure—of other people's."

The old man shook his head.

"I don't pretend to have contributed anything to the amusement of my contemporaries."

"My dear father, you are too modest!"

"That's a kind of joke, sir," said Lord Warburton.

"You young men have too many jokes. When there are no jokes, you have nothing left."

"Fortunately there are always more jokes," the ugly young man remarked.

"I don't believe it—I believe things are getting more serious. You young men will find that out."

"The increasing seriousness of things—that is the great opportunity of jokes."

"They will have to be grim jokes," said the old man. "I am convinced there will be great changes; and not all for the better."

"I quite agree with you, sir," Lord Warburton declared. "I am very sure there will be great changes, and that all sorts of queer things will happen. That's why I find so much difficulty in applying your advice; you know you told me the other day that I ought to 'take hold' of something. One hesitates to take hold of a thing that may the next moment be knocked sky-high."

"You ought to take hold of a pretty woman," said his companion. "He is trying hard to fall in love," he added, by way of explanation, to his father.

"The pretty women themselves may be sent flying!" Lord Warburton exclaimed.

"No, no, they will be firm," the old man rejoined; "they will not be affected by the social and political changes I just referred to."

"You mean they won't be abolished? Very well, then, I will lay hands on one as soon as possible, and tie her round my neck as a life-preserver."

"The ladies will save us," said the old man; "that is, the best of them will—for I make a difference between them. Make up to a good one and marry her, and your life will become much more interesting."

A momentary silence marked perhaps on the part of his auditors a sense of the magnanimity of this speech, for it was a secret neither for his son nor for his visitor that his

own experiment in matrimony had not been a happy one. As he said, however, he made a difference; and these words may have been intended as a confession of personal error; though of course it was not in place for either of his companions to remark that apparently the lady of his choice had not been one of the best.

"If I marry an interesting woman, I shall be interested: is that what you say?" Lord Warburton asked. "I am not at all keen about marrying—your son misrepresented me; but there is no knowing what an interesting woman might do with me."

"I should like to see your idea of an interesting woman," said his friend.

"My dear fellow, you can't see ideas—especially such ethereal ones as mine. If I could only see it myself—that would be a great step in advance."

"Well, you may fall in love with whomsoever you please; but you must not fall in love with my niece," said the old man.

His son broke into a laugh. "He will think you mean that as a provocation! My dear father, you have lived with the English for thirty years, and you have picked up a good many of the things they say. But you have never learned the things they don't say!"

"I say what I please," the old man declared, with all his serenity.

"I haven't the honour of knowing your niece," Lord Warburton said. "I think it is the first time I have heard of her."

"She is a niece of my wife's; Mrs. Touchett brings her to England."

Then young Mr. Touchett explained. "My mother, you know, has been spending the winter in America, and we are expecting her back. She writes that she has discovered a niece, and that she has invited her to come with her."

"I see—very kind of her," said Lord Warburton. "Is the young lady interesting?"

"We hardly know more about her than you; my mother has not gone into details. She chiefly communicates with us by means of telegrams, and her telegrams are rather inscrutable. They say women don't know how to write them, but my mother has thoroughly mastered the art of condensa-

tion. 'Tired America, hot weather awful, return England with niece, first steamer, decent cabin.' That's the sort of message we get from her—that was the last that came. But there had been another before, which I think contained the first mention of the niece. 'Changed hotel, very bad, impudent clerk, address here. Taken sister's girl, died last year, go to Europe, two sisters, quite independent.' Over that my father and I have scarcely stopped puzzling; it seems to admit of so many interpretations."

"There is one thing very clear in it," said the old man; "she has given the hotel-clerk a dressing."

"I am not sure even of that, since he has driven her from the field. We thought at first that the sister mentioned might be the sister of the clerk; but the subsequent mention of a niece seems to prove that the allusion is to one of my aunts. Then there was a question as to whose the two sisters were; they are probably two of my late aunt's daughters. But who is 'quite independent,' and in what sense is the term used?—that point is not yet settled. Does the expression apply more particularly to the young lady my mother has adopted, or does it characterise her sisters equally?—and is it used in a moral or in a financial sense? Does it mean that they have been left well off, or that they wish to be under no obligations? or does it simply mean that they are fond of their own way?"

"Whatever else it means, it is pretty sure to mean that," Mr. Touchett remarked.

"You will see for yourself," said Lord Warburton. "When does Mrs. Touchett arrive?"

"We are quite in the dark; as soon as she can find a decent cabin. She may be waiting for it yet; on the other hand, she may already have disembarked in England."

"In that case she would probably have telegraphed to you."

"She never telegraphs when you would expect it—only when you don't," said the old man. "She likes to drop on me suddenly; she thinks she will find me doing something wrong. She has never done so yet, but she is not discouraged."

"It's her independence," her son explained, more favourably. "Whatever that of those young ladies may be, her

own is a match for it. She likes to do everything for herself, and has no belief in any one's power to help her. She thinks me of no more use than a postage-stamp without gum, and she would never forgive me if I should presume to go to Liverpool to meet her."

"Will you at least let me know when your cousin arrives?" Lord Warburton asked.

"Only on the condition I have mentioned—that you don't fall in love with her!" Mr. Touchett declared.

"That strikes me as hard. Don't you think me good enough?"

"I think you too good—because I shouldn't like her to marry you. She hasn't come here to look for a husband, I hope; so many young ladies are doing that, as if there were no good ones at home. Then she is probably engaged; American girls are usually engaged, I believe. Moreover, I am not sure, after all, that you would be a good husband."

"Very likely she is engaged; I have known a good many American girls, and they always were; but I could never see that it made any difference, upon my word! As for my being a good husband, I am not sure of that either; one can but try!"

"Try as much as you please, but don't try on my niece," said the old man, whose opposition to the idea was broadly humorous.

"Ah, well," said Lord Warburton with a humour broader still, "perhaps, after all, she is not worth trying on!"

CHAPTER II

WHILE this exchange of pleasantries took place between the two, Ralph Touchett wandered away a little, with his usual slouching gait, his hands in his pockets, and his little rowdyish terrier at his heels. His face was turned towards the house, but his eyes were bent, musingly, upon the lawn; so that he had been an object of observation to a person who had just made her appearance in the doorway of the dwelling for some moments before he perceived her. His attention was called to her by the conduct of his dog, who had suddenly darted forward, with a little volley of shrill barks, in which the note of welcome, however, was more sensible than that of defiance. The person in question was a young lady, who seemed immediately to interpret the greeting of the little terrier. He advanced with great rapidity, and stood at her feet, looking up and barking hard; whereupon, without hesitation, she stooped and caught him in her hands, holding him face to face while he continued his joyous demonstration. His master now had had time to follow and to see that Bunchie's new friend was a tall girl in a black dress, who at first sight looked pretty. She was bare-headed, as if she were staying in the house—a fact which conveyed perplexity to the son of its master, conscious of that immunity from visitors which had for some time been rendered necessary by the latter's ill-health. Meantime the two other gentlemen had also taken note of the new-comer.

"Dear me, who is that strange woman?" Mr. Touchett had asked.

"Perhaps it is Mrs. Touchett's niece—the independent young lady," Lord Warburton suggested. "I think she must be, from the way she handles the dog."

The collie, too, had now allowed his attention to be diverted, and he trotted toward the young lady in the doorway, slowly setting his tail in motion as he went.

"But where is my wife, then?" murmured the old man.

"I suppose the young lady has left her somewhere: that's a part of the independence."

The girl spoke to Ralph, smiling, while she still held up the terrier. "Is this your little dog, sir?"

"He was mine a moment ago; but you have suddenly acquired a remarkable air of property in him."

"Couldn't we share him?" asked the girl. "He's such a little darling."

Ralph looked at her a moment; she was unexpectedly pretty. "You may have him altogether," he said.

The young lady seemed to have a great deal of confidence, both in herself and in others; but this abrupt generosity made her blush. "I ought to tell you that I am probably your cousin," she murmured, putting down the dog. "And here's another!" she added quickly, as the collie came up.

"Probably?" the young man exclaimed, laughing. "I supposed it was quite settled! Have you come with my mother?"

"Yes, half-an-hour ago."

"And has she deposited you and departed again?"

"No, she went straight to her room; and she told me that, if I should see you, I was to say to you that you must come to her there at a quarter to seven."

The young man looked at his watch. "Thank you very much; I shall be punctual." And then he looked at his cousin. "You are very welcome here," he went on. "I am delighted to see you."

She was looking at everything with an eye that denoted quick perception—at her companion, at the two dogs, at the two gentlemen under the trees, at the beautiful scene that surrounded her. "I have never seen anything so lovely as this place," she said. "I have been all over the house; it's too enchanting."

"I am sorry you should have been here so long without our knowing it."

"Your mother told me that in England people arrived very quietly; so I thought it was all right. Is one of those gentlemen your father?"

"Yes, the elder one—the one sitting down," said Ralph.

The young girl gave a laugh. "I don't suppose it's the other. Who is the other?"

"He is a friend of ours—Lord Warburton."

"Oh, I hoped there would be a lord; it's just like a novel!" And then—"O you adorable creature!" she suddenly cried, stooping down and picking up the little terrier again.

She remained standing where they had met, making no offer to advance or to speak to Mr. Touchett, and while she lingered in the doorway, slim and charming, her interlocutor wondered whether she expected the old man to come and pay her his respects. American girls were used to a great deal of deference, and it had been intimated that this one had a high spirit. Indeed, Ralph could see that in her face.

"Won't you come and make acquaintance with my father?" he nevertheless ventured to ask. "He is old and infirm—he doesn't leave his chair."

"Ah, poor man, I am very sorry!" the girl exclaimed, immediately moving forward. "I got the impression from your mother that he was rather—rather strong."

Ralph Touchett was silent a moment.

"She has not seen him for a year."

"Well, he has got a lovely place to sit. Come along, little dogs."

"It's a dear old place," said the young man, looking sidewise at his neighbour.

"What's his name?" she asked, her attention having reverted to the terrier again.

"My father's name?"

"Yes," said the young lady, humorously; "but don't tell him I asked you."

They had come by this time to where old Mr. Touchett was sitting, and he slowly got up from his chair to introduce himself.

"My mother has arrived," said Ralph, "and this is Miss Archer."

The old man placed his two hands on her shoulders, looked at her a moment with extreme benevolence, and then gallantly kissed her.

"It is a great pleasure to me to see you here; but I wish you had given us a chance to receive you."

"Oh, we were received," said the girl. "There were about a dozen servants in the hall. And there was an old woman curtseying at the gate."

"We can do better than that—if we have notice!" And the old man stood there, smiling, rubbing his hands, and slowly shaking his head at her. "But Mrs. Touchett doesn't like receptions."

"She went straight to her room."

"Yes—and locked herself in. She always does that. Well, I suppose I shall see her next week."

And Mrs. Touchett's husband slowly resumed his former posture.

"Before that," said Miss Archer. "She is coming down to dinner—at eight o'clock. Don't you forget a quarter to seven," she added, turning with a smile to Ralph.

"What is to happen at a quarter to seven?"

"I am to see my mother," said Ralph.

"Ah, happy boy!" the old man murmured. "You must sit down—you must have some tea," he went on, addressing his wife's niece.

"They gave me some tea in my room the moment I arrived," this young lady answered. "I am sorry you are out of health," she added, resting her eyes upon her venerable host.

"Oh, I'm an old man, my dear; it's time for me to be old. But I shall be the better for having you here."

She had been looking all round her again—at the lawn, the great trees, the reedy, silvery Thames, the beautiful old house; and while engaged in this survey, she had also narrowly scrutinized her companions; a comprehensiveness of observation easily conceivable on the part of a young woman who was evidently both intelligent and excited. She had seated herself, and had put away the little dog; her white hands, in her lap, were folded upon her black dress; her head was erect, her eye brilliant, her flexible figure turned itself lightly this way and that, in sympathy with the alertness with which she evidently caught impressions. Her impressions were numerous, and they were all reflected in

a clear, still smile. "I have never seen anything so beautiful as this," she declared.

"It's looking very well," said Mr. Touchett. "I know the way it strikes you. I have been through all that. But you are very beautiful yourself," he added with a politeness by no means crudely jocular, and with the happy consciousness that his advanced age gave him the privilege of saying such things—even to young girls who might possibly take alarm at them.

What degree of alarm this young girl took need not be exactly measured; she instantly rose, however, with a blush which was not a refutation.

"Oh yes, of course, I'm lovely!" she exclaimed quickly, with a little laugh. "How old is your house? Is it Elizabethan?"

"It's early Tudor," said Ralph Touchett.

She turned toward him, watching his face a little. "Early Tudor? How very delightful! And I suppose there are a great many others."

"There are many much better ones."

"Don't say that, my son!" the old man protested. "There is nothing better than this."

"I have got a very good one; I think in some respects it's rather better," said Lord Warburton, who as yet had not spoken but who had kept an attentive eye upon Miss Archer.

He bent towards her a little smiling; he had an excellent manner with women. The girl appreciated it in an instant; she had not forgotten that this was Lord Warburton. "I should like very much to show it to you," he added.

"Don't believe him," cried the old man; "don't look at it! It's a wretched old barrack—not to be compared with this."

"I don't know—I can't judge," said the girl, smiling at Lord Warburton.

In this discussion, Ralph Touchett took no interest whatever; he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking greatly as if he should like to renew his conversation with his newfound cousin.

"Are you very fond of dogs?" he inquired, by way of beginning; and it was an awkward beginning for a clever man.

"Very fond of them indeed."

"You must keep the terrier, you know," he went on, still awkwardly.

"I will keep him while I am here, with pleasure."

"That will be for a long time, I hope."

"You are very kind. I hardly know. My aunt must settle that."

"I will settle it with her—at a quarter to seven." And Ralph looked at his watch again.

"I am glad to be here at all," said the girl.

"I don't believe you allow things to be settled for you."

"Oh yes; if they are settled as I like them."

"I shall settle this as I like it," said Ralph. "It's most unaccountable that we should never have known you."

"I was there—you had only to come and see me."

"There? Where do you mean?"

"In the United States: in New York, and Albany, and other places."

"I have been there—all over, but I never saw you. I can't make it out."

Miss Archer hesitated a moment.

"It was because there had been some disagreement between your mother and my father, after my mother's death, which took place when I was a child. In consequence of it, we never expected to see you."

"Ah, but I don't embrace all my mother's quarrels—Heaven forbid!" the young man cried. "You have lately lost your father?" he went on, more gravely.

"Yes; more than a year ago. After that my aunt was very kind to me; she came to see me, and proposed that I should come to Europe."

"I see," said Ralph. "She has adopted you."

"Adopted me?"

The girl stared, and her blush came back to her, together with a momentary look of pain, which gave her interlocutor some alarm. He had under-estimated the effect of his words. Lord Warburton, who appeared constantly desirous of a nearer view of Miss Archer, strolled toward the two cousins at the moment, and as he did so, she rested her startled eyes upon him. "Oh, no; she has not adopted me," she said. "I am not a candidate for adoption."

"I beg a thousand pardons," Ralph murmured. "I meant—I meant——" He hardly knew what he meant.

"You meant she has taken me up. Yes; she likes to take people up. She has been very kind to me; but," she added, with a certain visible eagerness of desire to be explicit, "I am very fond of my liberty."

"Are you talking about Mrs. Touchett?" the old man called out from his chair. "Come here, my dear, and tell me about her. I am always thankful for information."

The girl hesitated a moment, smiling.

"She is really very benevolent," she answered; and then she went over to her uncle, whose mirth was excited by her words.

Lord Warburton was left standing with Ralph Touchett, to whom in a moment he said—

"You wished a while ago to see my idea of an interesting woman. There it is!"

CHAPTER III

MRS. TOUCHETT was certainly a person of many oddities, of which her behaviour on returning to her husband's house after many months was a noticeable specimen. She had her own way of doing all that she did, and this is the simplest description of a character which, although it was by no means without benevolence, rarely succeeded in giving an impression of softness. Mrs. Touchett might do a great deal of good, but she never pleased. This way of her own, of which she was so fond, was not intrinsically offensive—it was simply very sharply distinguished from the ways of others. The edges of her conduct were so very clear-cut that for susceptible persons it sometimes had a wounding effect. This purity of outline was visible in her deportment during the first hours of her return from America, under circumstances in which it might have seemed that her first act would have been to exchange greetings with her husband and son. Mrs. Touchett, for reasons which she deemed excellent, always retired on such occasions into impenetrable seclusion, postponing the more sentimental ceremony until she had achieved a toilet which had the less reason to be of high importance as neither beauty nor vanity were concerned in it. She was a plain-faced old woman, without coquetry and without any great elegance, but with an extreme respect for her own motives. She was usually prepared to explain these—when the explanation was asked as a favour; and in such a case they proved totally different from those that had been attributed to her. She was virtually separated from her husband, but she appeared to perceive nothing irregular in the situation. It had become apparent, at an early stage of their relations, that they should never desire the same thing at the same moment, and this fact had prompted her to rescue disagreement from the vulgar realm of accident. She did what she could to erect it into a law—a much more edifying aspect of it—by going

to live in Florence, where she bought a house and established herself; leaving her husband in England to take care of his bank. This arrangement greatly pleased her; it was so extremely definite. It struck her husband in the same light, in a foggy square in London, where it was at times the most definite fact he discerned; but he would have preferred that discomfort should have a greater vagueness. To agree to disagree had cost him an effort; he was ready to agree to almost anything but that, and saw no reason why either assent or dissent should be so terribly consistent. Mrs. Touchett indulged in no regrets nor speculations, and usually came once a year to spend a month with her husband, a period during which she apparently took pains to convince him that she had adopted the right system. She was not fond of England, and had three or four reasons for it to which she currently alluded; they bore upon minor points of British civilisation, but for Mrs. Touchett they amply justified non-residence. She detested bread-sauce, which, as she said, looked like a poultice and tasted like soap; she objected to the consumption of beer by her maid-servants; and she affirmed that the British laundress (Mrs. Touchett was very particular about the appearance of her linen) was not a mistress of her art. At fixed intervals she paid a visit to her own country; but this last one had been longer than any of its predecessors.

She had taken up her niece—there was little doubt of that. One wet afternoon, some four months earlier than the occurrence lately narrated, this young lady had been seated alone with a book. To say that she had a book is to say that her solitude did not press upon her; for her love of knowledge had a fertilising quality and her imagination was strong. There was at this time, however, a want of lightness in her situation, which the arrival of an unexpected visitor did much to dispel. The visitor had not been announced; the girl heard her at last walking about the adjoining room. It was an old house at Albany—a large, square, double house, with a notice of sale in the windows of the parlour. There were two entrances, one of which had long been out of use, but had never been removed. They were exactly alike—large white doors, with an arched frame

and wide sidelights, perched upon little "stoops" of red stone, which descended sidewise to the brick pavement of the street. The two houses together formed a single dwelling, the party-wall having been removed and the rooms placed in communication. These rooms, above-stairs, were extremely numerous, and were painted all over exactly alike, in a yellowish white which had grown sallow with time. On the third floor there was a sort of arched passage, connecting the two sides of the house, which Isabel and her sisters used in their childhood to call the tunnel, and which, though it was short and well-lighted, always seemed to the girl to be strange and lonely, especially on winter afternoons. She had been in the house, at different periods, as a child; in those days her grandmother lived there. Then there had been an absence of ten years, followed by a return to Albany before her father's death. Her grandmother, old Mrs. Archer, had exercised, chiefly within the limits of the family, a large hospitality in the early period, and the little girls often spent weeks under her roof—weeks of which Isabel had the happiest memory. The manner of life was different from that of her own home—larger, more plentiful, more sociable; the discipline of the nursery was delightfully vague, and the opportunity of listening to the conversation of one's elders (which with Isabel was a highly-valued pleasure) almost unbounded. There was a constant coming and going; her grandmother's sons and daughters, and their children, appeared to be in the enjoyment of standing invitations to stay with her, so that the house offered, to a certain extent, the appearance of a bustling provincial inn, kept by a gentle old landlady who sighed a great deal and never presented a bill. Isabel, of course, knew nothing about bills; but even as a child she thought her grandmother's dwelling picturesque. There was a covered piazza behind it, furnished with a swing, which was a source of tremulous interest; and beyond this was a long garden, sloping down to the stable, and containing certain capital peach-trees. Isabel had stayed with her grandmother at various seasons; but, somehow, all her visits had a flavour of peaches. On the other side, opposite, across the street, was an old house that was called the Dutch House—a peculiar structure, dating from the earliest

colonial time, composed of bricks that had been painted yellow, crowned with a gable that was pointed out to strangers, defended by a rickety wooden paling, and standing sidewise to the street. It was occupied by a primary school for children of both sexes, kept in a amateurish manner by a demonstrative lady, of whom Isabel's chief recollection was that her hair was puffed out very much at the temples and that she was the widow of some one of consequence. The little girl had been offered the opportunity of laying a foundation of knowledge in this establishment; but having spent a single day in it, she had expressed great disgust with the place, and had been allowed to stay at home, where in the September days, when the windows of the Dutch House were open, she used to hear the hum of childish voices repeating the multiplication table—an incident in which the elation of liberty and the pain of exclusion were indistinguishably mingled. The foundation of her knowledge was really laid in the idleness of her grandmother's house, where, as most of the other inmates were not reading people, she had uncontrolled use of a library full of books with frontispieces, which she used to climb upon a chair to take down. When she had found one to her taste—she was guided in the selection chiefly by the frontispiece—she carried it into a mysterious apartment which lay beyond the library, and which was called, traditionally, no one knew why, the office. Whose office it had been, and at what period it had flourished, she never learned; it was enough for her that it contained an echo and a pleasant musty smell, and that it was a chamber of disgrace for old pieces of furniture, whose infirmities were not always apparent (so that the disgrace seemed unmerited, and rendered them victims of injustice), and with which, in the manner of children, she had established relations almost human, or dramatic. There was an old haircloth sofa, in especial, to which she had confided a hundred childish sorrows. The place owed much of its mysterious melancholy to the fact that it was properly entered from the second door of the house, the door that had been condemned, and that was fastened by bolts which a particularly slender little girl found it impossible to slide. She knew that this silent, motionless portal opened into the street; if the sidelights had

not been filled with green paper, she might have looked out upon the little brown stoop and the well-worn brick pavement.

But she had no wish to look out, for this would have interfered with her theory that there was a strange, unseen place on the other side—a place which became, to the child's imagination, according to its different moods, a region of delight or of terror.

It was in the "office" still that Isabel was sitting on that melancholy afternoon of early spring which I have just mentioned. At this time she might have had the whole house to choose from, and the room she had selected was the most joyless chamber it contained. She had never opened the bolted door nor removed the green paper (renewed by other hands) from its side-lights; she had never assured herself that the vulgar street lay beyond it. A crude, cold rain was falling heavily; the spring-time presented itself as a questionable improvement. Isabel, however gave as little attention as possible to the incongruities of the season; she kept her eyes on her book and tried to fix her mind. It had lately occurred to her that her mind was a good deal of a vagabond, and she had spent much ingenuity in training it to a military step, and teaching it to advance, to halt, to retreat, to perform even more complicated manœuvres, at the word of command. Just now she had given it marching orders, and it had been trudging over the sandy plains of a history of German Thought. Suddenly she became aware of a step very different from her own intellectual pace; she listened a little, and perceived that some one was walking about the library, which communicated with the office. It struck her first as the step of a person from whom she had reason to expect a visit; then almost immediately announced itself as the tread of a woman and a stranger—her possible visitor being neither. It had an inquisitive, experimental quality, which suggested that it would not stop short of the threshold of the office; and in fact, the doorway of this apartment was presently occupied by a lady who paused there and looked very hard at our heroine. She was a plain, elderly woman, dressed in a comprehensive waterproof mantle: she had a sharp, but not an unpleasant, face.

"Oh," she said, "is that where you usually sit?" And she looked about at the heterogeneous chairs and tables.

"Not when I have visitors," said Isabel, getting up to receive the intruder.

She directed their course back to the library, and the visitor continued to look about her. "You seem to have plenty of other rooms; they are in rather better condition. But everything is immensely worn."

"Have you come to look at the house?" Isabel asked. "The servant will show it to you."

"Send her away; I don't want to buy it. She has probably gone to look for you, and is wandering about upstairs; she didn't seem at all intelligent. You had better tell her it is no matter." And then, while the girl stood there, hesitating and wondering, this unexpected critic said to her abruptly, "I suppose you are one of the daughters?"

Isabel thought she had very strange manners. "It depends upon whose daughters you mean."

"The late Mr. Archer's—and my poor sister's."

"Ah," said Isabel, slowly, "you must be our crazy Aunt Lydia!"

"Is that what your father told you to call me? I am your Aunt Lydia, but I am not crazy. And which of the daughters are you?"

"I am the youngest of the three, and my name is Isabel."

"Yes; the others are Lilian and Edith. And are you the prettiest?"

"I have not the least idea," said the girl.

"I think you must be." And in this way the aunt and the niece made friends. The aunt had quarreled, years before, with her brother-in-law, after the death of her sister, taking him to task for the manner in which he brought up his three girls. Being a high-tempered man, he had requested her to mind her own business; and she had taken him at his word. For many years she held no communication with him, and after his death she addressed not a word to his daughters, who had been bred in that disrespectful view of her which we have just seen Isabel betray. Mrs. Touchett's behaviour was, as usual, perfectly deliberate. She intended to go to America to look after her investments (with which her hus-

band, in spite of his great financial position, had nothing to do), and would take advantage of this opportunity to inquire into the condition of her nieces. There was no need of writing, for she should attach no importance to any account of them that she should elicit by letter; she believed, always, in seeing for one's self. Isabel found, however, that she knew a good deal about them, and knew about the marriage of the two elder girls; knew that their poor father had left very little money, but that the house in Albany, which had passed into his hands, was to be sold for their benefit; knew, finally, that Edmund Ludlow, Lilian's husband, had taken upon himself to attend to this matter, in consideration of which the young couple, who had come to Albany during Mr. Archer's illness, were remaining there for the present, and, as well as Isabel herself, occupying the mansion.

"How much money do you expect to get for it?" Mrs. Touchett asked of the girl, who had brought her to sit in the front-parlour, which she had inspected without enthusiasm.

"I haven't the least idea," said the girl.

"That's the second time you have said that to me," her aunt rejoined. "And yet you don't look at all stupid."

"I am not stupid; but I don't know anything about money."

"Yes, that's the way you were brought up—as if you were to inherit a million. In point of fact, what have you inherited?"

"I really can't tell you. You must ask Edmund and Lilian; they will be back in half-an-hour."

"In Florence we should call it a very bad house," said Mrs. Touchett; "but here, I suspect, it will bring a high price. It ought to make a considerable sum for each of you. In addition to that, you *must* have something else; it's most extraordinary your not knowing. The position is of value, and they will probably pull it down and make a row of shops. I wonder you don't do that yourself; you might let the shops to great advantage."

Isabel stared; the idea of letting shops was new to her.

"I hope they won't pull it down," she said; "I am extremely fond of it."

"I don't see what makes you fond of it; your father died here."

"Yes; but I don't dislike it for that," said the girl, rather strangely. "I like places in which things have happened—even if they are sad things. A great many people have died here; the place has been full of life."

"Is that what you call being full of life?"

"I mean full of experience—of people's feelings and sorrows. And not of their sorrows only, for I have been very happy here as a child."

"You should go to Florence if you like houses in which things have happened—especially deaths. I live in an old palace in which three people have been murdered; three that were known, and I don't know how many more besides."

"In an old palace?" Isabel repeated.

"Yes, my dear; a very different affair from this. This is very *bourgeois*."

Isabel felt some emotion, for she had always thought highly of her grandmother's house. But the emotion was of a kind which led her to say—

"I should like very much to go to Florence."

"Well, if you will be very good, and do everything I tell you, I will take you there," Mrs. Touchett rejoined.

The girl's emotion deepened; she flushed a little, and smiled at her aunt in silence.

"Do everything you tell me? I don't think I can promise that."

"No, you don't look like a young lady of that sort. You are fond of your own way; but it's not for me to blame you."

"And yet, to go to Florence," the girl exclaimed in a moment, "I would promise almost anything!"

Edmund and Lilian were slow to return, and Mrs. Touchett had an hour's uninterrupted talk with her niece, who found her a strange and interesting person. She was as eccentric as Isabel had always supposed; and hitherto, whenever the girl had heard people described as eccentric, she had thought of them as disagreeable. To her imagination the term had always suggested something grotesque and inharmonious. But her aunt infused a new vividness into the idea, and gave her so many fresh impressions that it seemed to her she had over-estimated the charms of conformity. She had never met any one so entertaining as this little thin-lipped, bright-

eyed, foreign-looking woman, who retrieved an insignificant appearance by a distinguished manner, and, sitting there in a well-worn waterproof, talked with striking familiarity of European courts. There was nothing flighty about Mrs. Touchett, but she was fond of social grandeur, and she enjoyed the consciousness of making an impression on a candid and susceptible mind. Isabel at first had answered a good many questions, and it was from her answers apparently that Mrs. Touchett derived a high opinion of her intelligence. But after this she had asked a good many, and her aunt's answers, whatever they were, struck her as deeply interesting. Mrs. Touchett waited for the return of her other niece as long as she thought reasonable, but as at six o'clock Mrs. Ludlow had not come in, she prepared to take her departure.

"Your sister must be a great gossip," she said. "Is she accustomed to staying out for hours?"

"You have been out almost as long as she," Isabel answered; "she can have left the house but a short time before you came in."

Mrs. Touchett looked at the girl without resentment, she appeared to enjoy a bold retort, and to be disposed to be gracious to her niece.

"Perhaps she has not had so good an excuse as I. Tell her, at any rate, that she must come and see me this evening at that horrid hotel. She may bring her husband if she likes, but she needn't bring you. I shall see plenty of you later."

CHAPTER IV

MRS. LUDLOW was the eldest of the three sisters, and was usually thought the most sensible; the classification being in general that Lilian was the practical one, Edith the beauty, and Isabel the "intellectual" one. Mrs. Keyes, the second sister, was the wife of an officer in the United States Engineers, and as our history is not further concerned with her, it will be enough to say that she was indeed very pretty, and that she formed the ornament of those various military stations, chiefly in the unfashionable West, to which, to her deep chagrin, her husband was successively relegated.

Lilian had married a New York lawyer, a young man with a loud voice and an enthusiasm for his profession; the match was not brilliant, any more than Edith's had been, but Lilian had occasionally been spoken of as a young woman who might be thankful to marry at all—she was so much plainer than her sisters. She was, however, very happy, and now, as the mother of two peremptory little boys, and the mistress of a house which presented a narrowness of new brown stone to Fifty-third Street, she had quite justified her claim to matrimony. She was short and plump, and, as people said, had improved since her marriage; the two things in life of which she was most distinctly conscious were her husband's force in argument and her sister Isabel's originality.

"I have never felt like Isabel's sister, and I am sure I never shall," she had said to an intimate friend; a declaration which made it all the more creditable that she had been prolific in sisterly offices.

"I want to see her safely married—that's what I want to see," she frequently remarked to her husband.

"Well, I must say I should have no particular desire to marry her," Edmund Ludlow was accustomed to answer, in an extremely audible tone.

"I know you say that for argument; you always take the opposite ground. I don't see what you have against her, except that she is so original."

"Well, I don't like originals; I like translations," Mr. Ludlow had more than once replied. "Isabel is written in a foreign tongue. I can't make her out. She ought to marry an Armenian, or a Portuguese."

"That's just what I am afraid she will do!" cried Lilian, who thought Isabel capable of anything.

She listened with great interest to the girl's account of Mrs. Touchett's visit, and in the evening prepared to comply with her commands.

Of what Isabel said to her no report has remained, but her sister's words must have prompted a remark that she made to her husband in the conjugal chamber as the two were getting ready to go to the hotel.

"I do hope immensely she will do something handsome for Isabel; she has evidently taken a great fancy to her."

"What is it you wish her to do?" Edmund Ludlow asked; "make her a big present?"

"No, indeed; nothing of the sort. But take an interest in her—sympathise with her. She is evidently just the sort of person to appreciate Isabel. She has lived so much in foreign society; she told Isabel all about it. You know you have always thought Isabel rather foreign."

"You want her to give her a little foreign sympathy, eh? Don't you think she gets enough at home?"

"Well, she ought to go abroad," said Mrs. Ludlow. "She's just the person to go abroad."

"And you want the old lady to take her, is that it?" her husband asked.

"She has offered to take her—she is dying to have Isabel go! But what I want her to do when she gets her there is to give her all the advantages. I am sure that all we have got to do," said Mrs. Ludlow, "is to give her a chance!"

"A chance for what?"

"A chance to develop."

"O Jupiter!" Edmund Ludlow exclaimed. "I hope she isn't going to develop any more!"

"If I were not sure you only said that for argument, I should feel very badly," his wife replied. "But you know you love her."

"Do *you* know I love you?" the young man said, jocosely, to Isabel a little later, while he brushed his hat.

"I am sure I don't care whether you do or not!" exclaimed the girl, whose voice and smile, however, were sweeter than the words she uttered.

"Oh, she feels so grand since Mrs. Touchett's visit," said her sister.

But Isabel challenged this assertion with a good deal of seriousness.

"You must not say that, Lily. I don't feel grand at all."

"I am sure there is no harm," said the conciliatory Lily.

"Ah, but there is nothing in Mrs. Touchett's visit to make one feel grand."

"Oh," exclaimed Ludlow, "she is grander than ever!"

"Whenever I feel grand," said the girl, "it will be for a better reason."

Whether she felt grand or no, she at any rate felt busy; busy, I mean, with her thoughts. Left to herself for the evening, she sat awhile under the lamp, with empty hands, heedless of her usual avocations. Then she rose and moved about the room, and from one room to another, preferring the places where the vague lamplight expired. She was restless, and even excited; at moments she trembled a little. She felt that something had happened to her of which the importance was out of proportion to its appearance; there had really been a change in her life. What it would bring with it was as yet extremely indefinite; but Isabel was in a situation which gave a value to any change. She had a desire to leave the past behind her, and, as she said to herself, to begin afresh. This desire, indeed, was not a birth of the present occasion; it was as familiar as the sound of the rain upon the window, and it had led to her beginning afresh a great many times. She closed her eyes as she sat in one of the dusky corners of the quiet parlour; but it was not with a desire to take a nap. On the contrary, it was because she felt too wide-awake, and wished to check the sense of seeing too many things at once. Her imagina-

tion was by habit ridiculously active; if the door were not opened to it, it jumped out of the window. She was not accustomed, indeed, to keep it behind bolts; and, at important moments, when she would have been thankful to make use of her judgment alone, she paid the penalty of having given undue encouragement to the faculty of seeing without judging. At present, with her sense that the note of change had been struck, came gradually a host of images of the things she was leaving behind her. The years and hours of her life came back to her, and for a long time, in a stillness broken only by the ticking of the big bronze clock, she passed them in review. It had been a very happy life and she had been a very fortunate girl—this was the truth that seemed to emerge most vividly. She had had the best of everything, and in a world in which the circumstances of so many people made them unenviable, it was an advantage never to have known anything particularly disagreeable. It appeared to Isabel that the disagreeable had been even too absent from her knowledge, for she had gathered from her acquaintance with literature that it was often a source of interest, and even of instruction. Her father had kept it away from her—her handsome, much-loved father, who always had such an aversion to it. It was a great good fortune to have been his daughter; Isabel was even proud of her parentage. Since his death she had gathered a vague impression that he turned his brighter side to his children, and that he had not eluded discomfort quite so much in practice as in aspiration. But this only made her tenderness for him greater; it was scarcely even painful to have to think that he was too generous, too good-natured, too indifferent to sordid considerations. Many persons thought that he carried this indifference too far; especially the large number of those to whom he owed money. Of their opinions, Isabel was never very definitely informed; but it may interest the reader to know that, while they admitted that the late Mr. Archer had a remarkably handsome head and a very taking manner (indeed, as one of them had said, he was always taking something), they declared that he had made a very poor use of his life. He had squandered a substantial fortune, he had been deplor-

ably convivial, he was known to have gambled freely. A few very harsh critics went so far as to say that he had not even brought up his daughters. They had had no regular education and no permanent home; they had been at once spoiled and neglected; they had lived with nursemaids and governesses (usually very bad ones), or had been sent to strange schools kept by foreigners, from which, at the end of a month, they had been removed in tears. This view of the matter would have excited Isabel's indignation, for to her own sense her opportunities had been abundant. Even when her father had left his daughters for three months at Neufchâtel with a French *bonne*, who eloped with a Russian nobleman, staying at the same hotel—even in this irregular situation (an incident of the girl's eleventh year) she had been neither frightened nor ashamed, but had thought it a picturesque episode in a liberal education. Her father had a large way of looking at life, of which his restlessness and even his occasional incoherency of conduct had been only a proof. He wished his daughters, even as children, to see as much of the world as possible; and it was for this purpose that, before Isabel was fourteen, he had transported them three times across the Atlantic, giving them on each occasion, however, but a few months' view of foreign lands; a course which had whetted our heroine's curiosity without enabling her to satisfy it. She ought to have been a partisan of her father, for among his three daughters she was quite his favourite, and in his last days his general willingness to take leave of a world in which the difficulty of doing as one liked appeared to increase as one grew older was sensibly modified by the pain of separation from his clever, his superior, his remarkable girl. Later, when the journeys to Europe ceased, he still had shown his children all sorts of indulgence, and if he had been troubled about money-matters, nothing ever disturbed their irreflective consciousness of many possessions. Isabel, though she danced very well had not the recollection of having been in New York a successful member of the choregraphic circle; her sister Edith was, as every one said, so very much more popular. Edith was so striking an example of success that Isabel could have no illusions as to

what constituted this advantage, or as to the moderate character of her own triumphs. Nineteen persons out of twenty (including the younger sister herself) pronounced Edith infinitely the prettier of the two; but the twentieth, besides reversing this judgment, had the entertainment of thinking all the others a parcel of fools. Isabel had in the depths of her nature an even more unquenchable desire to please than Edith; but the depths of this young lady's nature were a very out-of-the-way place, between which and the surface communication was interrupted by a dozen capricious forces. She saw the young men who came in large numbers to see her sister; but as a general thing they were afraid of her; they had a belief that some special preparation was required for talking with her. Her reputation of reading a great deal hung about her like the cloudy envelope of a goddess in an epic; it was supposed to engender difficult questions, and to keep the conversation at a low temperature. The poor girl liked to be thought clever, but she hated to be thought bookish; she used to read in secret, and, though her memory was excellent, to abstain from quotation. She had a great desire for knowledge, but she really preferred almost any source of information to the printed page; she had an immense curiosity about life, and was constantly staring and wondering. She carried within herself a great fund of life, and her deepest enjoyment was to feel the continuity between the movements of her own heart and the agitations of the world. For this reason she was fond of seeing great crowds and large stretches of country, of reading about revolutions and wars, of looking at historical pictures—a class of efforts to which she had often gone so far as to forgive much bad painting for the sake of the subject. While the Civil War went on, she was still a very young girl; but she passed months of this long period in a state of almost passionate excitement, in which she felt herself at times (to her extreme confusion) stirred almost indiscriminately by the valour of either army. Of course the circumspection of the local youth had never gone the length of making her a social proscript; for the proportion of those whose hearts, as they approached her, beat only just fast enough to make it a sensible pleasure

was sufficient to redeem her maidenly career from failure. She had had everything that a girl could have: kindness, admiration, flattery, bouquets, the sense of exclusion from none of the privileges of the world she lived in, abundant opportunity for dancing, the latest publications, plenty of new dresses, the London *Spectator,* and a glimpse of contemporary æsthetics.

These things now, as memory played over them, resolved themselves into a multitude of scenes and figures. Forgotten things came back to her; many others, which she had lately thought of great moment, dropped out of sight. The result was kaleidoscopic; but the movement of the instrument was checked at last by the servant's coming in with the name of a gentleman. The name of the gentleman was Caspar Goodwood; he was a straight young man from Boston, who had known Miss Archer for the last twelvemonth, and who, thinking her the most beautiful young woman of her time, had pronounced the time, according to the rule I have hinted at, a foolish period of history. He sometimes wrote to Isabel, and he had lately written to her from New York. She had thought it very possible he would come in—had, indeed, all the rainy day been vaguely expecting him. Nevertheless, now that she learned he was there, she felt no eagerness to receive him. He was the finest young man she had ever seen, was, indeed, quite a magnificent young man; he filled her with a certain feeling of respect which she had never entertained for any one else. He was supposed by the world in general to wish to marry her; but this of course was between themselves. It at least may be affirmed that he had traveled from New York to Albany expressly to see her; having learned in the former city, where he was spending a few days and where he had hoped to find her, that she was still at the capital. Isabel delayed for some minutes to go to him; she moved about the room with a certain feeling of embarrassment. But at last she presented herself, and found him standing near the lamp. He was tall, strong, and somewhat stiff; he was also lean and brown. He was not especially good looking, but his physiognomy had an air of requesting your attention, which it rewarded or not, according to the charm

you found in a blue eye of remarkable fixedness and a jaw of the somewhat angular mould, which is supposed to bespeak of resolution. Isabel said to herself that it bespoke resolution to-night; but, nevertheless, an hour later, Caspar Goodwood, who had arrived hopeful as well as resolute, took his way back to his lodging with the feeling of a man defeated. He was not, however, a man to be discouraged by a defeat.

CHAPTER V

RALPH TOUCHETT was a philosopher, but nevertheless he knocked at his mother's door (at a quarter to seven) with a good deal of eagerness. Even philosophers have their preferences, and it must be admitted that of his progenitors his father ministered most to his sense of the sweetness of filial dependence. His father, as he had often said to himself, was the more motherly; his mother, on the other hand, was paternal, and even, according to the slang of the day, gubernatorial. She was nevertheless very fond of her only child, and had always insisted on his spending three months of the year with her. Ralph rendered perfect justice to her affection, and knew that in her thoughts his turn always came after the care of her house and her conservatory (she was extremely fond of flowers). He found her completely dressed for dinner, but she embraced her boy with her gloved hands, and made him sit on the sofa beside her. She inquired scrupulously about her husband's health and about the young man's own, and receiving no very brilliant account of either, she remarked that she was more than ever convinced of her wisdom in not exposing herself to the English climate. In this case she also might have broken down. Ralph smiled at the idea of his mother breaking down, but made no point of reminding her that his own enfeebled condition was not the result of the English climate, from which he absented himself for a considerable part of each year.

He had been a very small boy when his father, Daniel Tracy Touchett, who was a native of Rutland, in the State of Vermont, came to England as subordinate partner in a banking-house, in which some ten years later he acquired a preponderant interest. Daniel Touchett saw before him a life-long residence in his adopted country, of which, from the first, he took a simple, cheerful, and eminently practical view. But, as he said to himself, he had no intention of

turning Englishman, nor had he any desire to convert his only son to the same sturdy faith. It had been for himself so very soluble a problem to live in England, and yet not be of it, that it seemed to him equally simple that after his death his lawful heir should carry on the bank in a pure American spirit. He took pains to cultivate this spirit, however, by sending the boy home for his education. Ralph spent several terms in an American school, and took a degree at an American college, after which, as he struck his father on his return as even redundantly national, he was placed for some three years in residence at Oxford. Oxford swallowed up Harvard, and Ralph became at last English enough. His outward conformity to the manners that surrounded him was none the less the mask of a mind that greatly enjoyed its independence, on which nothing long imposed itself, and which, naturally inclined to jocosity and irony, indulged in a boundless liberty of appreciation. He began with being a young man of promise; at Oxford he distinguished himself, to his father's ineffable satisfaction, and the people about him said it was a thousand pities so clever a fellow should be shut out from a career. He might have had a career by returning to his own country (though this point is shrouded in uncertainty), and even if Mr. Touchett had been willing to part with him (which was not the case), it would have gone hard with him to put the ocean (which he detested) permanently between himself and the old man whom he regarded as his best friend. Ralph was not only fond of his father, but he admired him—he enjoyed the opportunity of observing him. Daniel Touchett to his perception was a man of genius, and though he himself had no great fancy for the banking business, he made a point of learning enough of it to measure the great figure his father had played. It was not this, however, he mainly relished, it was the old man's effective simplicity. Daniel Touchett had been neither at Harvard nor at Oxford, and it was his own fault if he had put into his son's hands the key to modern criticism. Ralph, whose head was full of ideas which his father had never guessed, had a high esteem for the latter's originality. Americans, rightly or wrongly, are com-

mended for the ease with which they adapt themselves to foreign conditions; but Mr. Touchett had given evidence of this talent only up to a certain point. He had made himself thoroughly comfortable in England, but he had never attempted to pitch his thoughts in the English key. He had retained many characteristics of Rutland, Vermont; his tone, as his son always noted with pleasure, was that of the more luxuriant parts of New England. At the end of his life, especially, he was a gentle, refined, fastidious old man, who combined consummate shrewdness with a sort of fraternising good-humour, and whose feeling about his own position in the world was quite of the democratic sort. It was perhaps his want of imagination and of what is called the historic consciousness; but to many of the impressions usually made by English life upon the cultivated stranger his sense was completely closed. There were certain differences he never perceived, certain habits he never formed, certain mysteries he never understood. As regards these latter, on the day that he had understood them his son would have thought less well of him.

Ralph, on leaving Oxford, spent a couple of years in travelling; after which he found himself mounted on a high stool in his father's bank. The responsibility and honour of such positions is not, I believe, measured by the height of the stool which depends upon other considerations; Ralph, indeed, who had very long legs, was fond of standing, and even of walking about, at his work. To this exercise, however, he was obliged to devote but a limited period, for at the end of some eighteen months he became conscious that he was seriously out of health. He had caught a violent cold, which fixed itself upon his lungs and threw them into extreme embarrassment. He had to give up work and embrace the sorry occupation known as taking care of one's self. At first he was greatly disgusted; it appeared to him that it was not himself in the least that he was taking care of, but an uninteresting and uninterested person with whom he had nothing in common. This person, however, improved on acquaintance, and Ralph grew at last to have a certain grudging tolerance, and even undemonstrative respect, for him. Misfortune makes

strange bed-fellows, and our young man, feeling that he had something at stake in the matter—it usually seemed to him to be his reputation for common sense—devoted to his unattractive *protégé* an amount of attention of which note was duly taken, and which had at least the effect of keeping the poor fellow alive. One of his lungs began to heal, the other promised to follow its example, and he was assured that he might outweather a dozen winters if he would betake himself to one of those climates in which consumptives chiefly congregate. He had grown extremely fond of London, and cursed this immitigable necessity; but at the same time that he cursed, he conformed, and gradually, when he found that his sensitive organ was really grateful for such grim favours, he conferred them with a better grace. He wintered abroad, as the phrase is; basked in the sun, stopped at home when the wind blew, went to bed when it rained, and once or twice, when it snowed, almost never got up again. A certain fund of indolence that he possessed came to his aid and helped to reconcile him to doing nothing; for at the best he was too ill for anything but a passive life. As he said to himself, there was really nothing he had wanted very much to do, so that he had given up nothing. At present, however, the perfume of forbidden fruit seemed occasionally to float past him, to remind him that the finest pleasures of life are to be found in the world of action. Living as he now lived was like reading a good book in a poor translation—a meagre entertainment for a young man who felt that he might have been an excellent linguist. He had good winters and poor winters, and while the former lasted he was sometimes the sport of a vision of virtual recovery. But this vision was dispelled some three years before the occurrence of the incidents with which this history opens; he had on this occasion remained later than usual in England, and had been overtaken by bad weather before reaching Algiers. He reached it more dead than alive, and lay there for several weeks between life and death. His convalescence was a miracle, but the first use he made of it was to assure himself that such miracles happen but once. He said to himself that his hour was in sight, and that it

behoved him to keep his eyes upon it, but that it was also open to him to spend the interval as agreeably as might be consistent with such a pre-occupation. With the prospect of losing them, the simple use of his faculties became an exquisite pleasure; it seemed to him that the delights of observation had never been suspected. He was far from the time when he had found it hard that he should be obliged to give up the idea of distinguishing himself; an idea none the less importunate for being vague, and none the less delightful for having to struggle with a good deal of native indifference. His friends at present found him much more cheerful, and attributed it to a theory, over which they shook their heads knowingly, that he would recover his health. The truth was that he had simply accepted the situation.

It was very probable this sweet-tasting property of observation to which I allude (for he found himself in these last years much more inclined to notice the pleasant things of the world than the others) that was mainly concerned in Ralph's quickly-stirred interest in the arrival of a young lady who was evidently not insipid. If he were observantly disposed, something told him, here was occupation enough for a succession of days. It may be added, somewhat crudely, that the liberty of falling in love had a place in Ralph Touchett's programme. This was of course a liberty to be very temperately used; for though the safest form of any sentiment is that which is conditioned upon silence, it is not always the most comfortable, and Ralph had forbidden himself the art of demonstration. But conscious observation of a lovely woman had struck him as the finest entertainment that the world now had to offer him, and if the interest should become poignant, he flattered himself that he could carry it off quietly, as he had carried other discomforts. He speedily acquired a conviction, however, that he was not destined to fall in love with his cousin.

"And now tell me about the young lady," he said to his mother. "What do you mean to do with her?"

Mrs. Touchett hesitated a little. "I mean to ask your father to invite her to stay three or four weeks at Gardencourt."

"You needn't stand on any such ceremony as that," said Ralph. "My father will ask her as a matter of course."

"I don't know about that. She is my niece; she is not his."

"Good Lord, dear mother; what a sense of property! That's all the more reason for his asking her. But after that—I mean after three months (for it's absurd asking the poor girl to remain but for three or four paltry weeks)—what do you mean to do with her?"

"I mean to take her to Paris, to get her some clothes."

"Ah yes, that's of course. But independently of that?"

"I shall invite her to spend the autumn with me in Florence."

"You don't rise above detail, dear mother," said Ralph. "I should like to know what you mean to do with her in a general way."

"My duty!" Mrs. Touchett declared. "I suppose you pity her very much," she added.

"No, I don't think I pity her. She doesn't strike me as a girl that suggests compassion. I think I envy her. Before being sure, however, give me a hint of what your duty will direct you to do."

"It will direct me to show her four European countries—I shall leave her the choice of two of them—and to give her the opportunity of perfecting herself in French, which she already knows very well."

Ralph frowned a little. "That sounds rather dry—even giving her the choice of two of the countries."

"If it's dry," said his mother with a laugh, "you can leave Isabel alone to water it! She is as good as a summer rain, any day."

"Do you mean that she is a gifted being?"

"I don't know whether she is a gifted being, but she is a clever girl, with a strong will and a high temper. She has no idea of being bored."

"I can imagine that," said Ralph; and then he added, abruptly, "How do you two get on?"

"Do you mean by that that I am a bore? I don't think Isabel finds me one. Some girls might, I know; but this one is too clever for that. I think I amuse her a good deal. We get on very well, because I understand her; I

know the sort of girl she is. She is very frank, and I am very frank; we know just what to expect of each other."

"Ah, dear mother," Ralph exclaimed, "one always knows what to expect of you! You have never surprised me but once, and that is to-day—in presenting me with a pretty cousin whose existence I had never suspected."

"Do you think her very pretty?"

"Very pretty indeed; but I don't insist upon that. It's her general air of being some one in particular that strikes me. Who is this rare creature, and what is she? Where did you find her, and how did you make her acquaintance?"

"I found her in an old house at Albany, sitting in a dreary room on a rainy day, reading a heavy book, and boring herself to death. She didn't know she was bored, but when I told her, she seemed very grateful for the hint. You may say I shouldn't have told her—I should have let her alone. There is a good deal in that; but I acted conscientiously; I thought she was meant for something better. It occurred to me that it would be a kindness to take her about and introduce her to the world. She thinks she knows a great deal of it—like most American girls; but like most American girls she is very much mistaken. If you want to know, I thought she would do me credit. I like to be well thought of, and for a woman of my age there is no more becoming ornament than an attractive niece. You know I had seen nothing of my sister's children for years; I disapproved entirely of the father. But I always meant to do something for them when he should have gone to his reward. I ascertained where they were to be found, and, without any preliminaries, went and introduced myself. There are two other sisters, both of whom are married; but I saw only the elder, who has, by the way, a very uncivil husband. The wife, whose name is Lily, jumped at the idea of my taking an interest in Isabel; she said it was just what her sister needed—that some one should take an interest in her. She spoke of her as you might speak of some young person of genius, in want of encouragement and patronage. It may be that Isabel is a genius; but in that case I have not yet learned her special

line. Mrs. Ludlow was especially keen about my taking her to Europe; they all regard Europe over there as a sort of land of emigration, a refuge for their superfluous population. Isabel herself seemed very glad to come, and the thing was easily arranged. There was a little difficulty about the money-question, as she seemed averse to being under pecuniary obligations. But she has a small income, and she supposes herself to be travelling at her own expense."

Ralph had listened attentively to this judicious account of his pretty cousin, by which his interest in her was not impaired. "Ah, if she is a genius," he said, "we must find out her special line. Is it, by chance, for flirting?"

"I don't think so. You may suspect that at first, but you will be wrong."

"Warburton is wrong, then!" Ralph Touchett exclaimed. "He flatters himself he has made that discovery."

His mother shook her head. "Lord Warburton won't understand her; he needn't try."

"He is very intelligent," said Ralph; "but it's right he should be puzzled once in a while."

"Isabel will enjoy puzzling a lord," Mrs. Touchett remarked.

Her son frowned a little. "What does she know about lords?"

"Nothing at all; that will puzzle him all the more."

Ralph greeted these words with a laugh, and looked out of the window a little. Then—"Are you not going down to see my father?" he asked.

"At a quarter to eight," said Mrs. Touchett.

Her son looked at his watch. "You have another quarter of an hour, then; tell me some more about Isabel."

But Mrs. Touchett declined his invitation, declaring that he must find out for himself.

"Well," said Ralph, "she will certainly do you credit. But won't she also give you trouble?"

"I hope not; but if she does, I shall not shrink from it. I never do that."

"She strikes me as very natural," said Ralph.

"Natural people are not the most trouble."

"No," said Ralph; "you yourself are a proof of that. You are extremely natural, and I am sure you have never troubled any one. But tell me this; it just occurs to me. Is Isabel capable of making herself disagreeable?"

"Ah," cried his mother, "you ask too many questions! Find that out for yourself."

His questions, however, were not exhausted. "All this time," he said, "you have not told me what you intend to do with her."

"Do with her? You talk as if she were a yard of calico. I shall do absolutely nothing with her, and she herself will do everything that she chooses. She gave me notice of that."

"What you meant then, in your telegram, was that her character was independent."

"I never know what I mean by my telegrams—especially those I send from America. Clearness is too expensive. Come down to your father."

"It is not yet a quarter to eight," said Ralph.

"I must allow for his impatience," Mrs. Touchett answered.

Ralph knew what to think of his father's impatience; but making no rejoinder, he offered his mother his arm. This put it into his power, as they descended together, to stop her a moment on the middle landing of the staircase—the broad, low, wide-armed staircase of time-stained oak which was one of the most striking ornaments of Gardencourt.

"You have no plan of marrying her?" he said, smiling.

"Marry her? I should be sorry to play her such a trick! But apart from that, she is perfectly able to marry herself; she has every facility."

"Do you mean to say she has a husband picked out?"

"I don't know about a husband, but there is a young man in Boston——"

Ralph went on; he had no desire to hear about the young man in Boston. "As my father says," he exclaimed, "they are always engaged!"

His mother had told him that he must extract his information about his cousin from the girl herself, and it soon became evident to him that he should not want for opportunity.

He had, for instance, a good deal of talk with her that same evening, when the two had been left alone together in the drawing-room. Lord Warburton, who had ridden over from his own house, some ten miles distant, remounted and took his departure before dinner; and an hour after this meal was concluded, Mr. and Mrs. Touchett, who appeared to have exhausted each other's conversation, withdrew, under the valid pretext of fatigue, to their respective apartments. The young man spent an hour with his cousin; though she had been travelling half the day she appeared to have no sense of weariness. She was really tired; she knew it, and knew that she should pay for it on the morrow; but it was her habit at this period to carry fatigue to the furthest point, and confess to it only when dissimulation had become impossible. For the present it was perfectly possible; she was interested and excited. She asked Ralph to show her the pictures; there were a great many of them in the house, most of them of his own choosing. The best of them were arranged in an oaken gallery of charming proportions, which had a sitting-room at either end of it, and which in the evening was usually lighted. The light was insufficient to show the pictures to advantage, and the visit might have been deferred till the morrow. This suggestion Ralph had ventured to make; but Isabel looked disappointed—smiling still, however—and said, "If you please, I should like to see them just a little." She was eager, she knew that she was eager and that she seemed so; but she could not help it. "She doesn't take suggestions," Ralph said to himself; but he said it without irritation; her eagerness amused and even pleased him. The lamps were on brackets, at intervals, and if the light was imperfect it was genial. It fell upon the vague squares of rich colour and on the faded gilding of heavy frames; it made a shining on the polished floor of the gallery. Ralph took a candlestick and moved about, pointing out the things he liked; Isabel, bending toward one picture after another, indulged in little exclamations and murmurs. She was evidently a judge; she had a natural taste; he was struck with that. She took a candlestick herself and held it slowly here and there; she lifted it high, and as she did so, he found himself pausing in the middle of the gallery and bending

his eyes much less upon the pictures than on her figure. He lost nothing, in truth, by these wandering glances; for she was better worth looking at than most works of art. She was thin, and light, and middling tall; when people had wished to distinguish her from the other two Miss Archers, they always called her the thin one. Her hair, which was dark even to blackness, had been an object of envy to many women; her light grey eye, a little too keen perhaps in her graver moments, had an enchanting softness when she smiled. They walked slowly up one side of the gallery and down the other, and then she said—

"Well, now I know more than I did when I began!"

"You apparently have a great passion for knowledge," her cousin answered, laughing.

"I think I have; most girls seem to me so ignorant," said Isabel.

"You strike me as different from most girls."

"Ah, some girls are so nice," murmured Isabel, who preferred not to talk about herself. Then, in a moment, to change the subject, she went on, "Please tell me—isn't there a ghost?"

"A ghost?"

"A spectre, a phantom; we call them ghosts in America."

"So we do here, when we see them."

"You do see them, then? You ought to, in this romantic old house."

"It's not a romantic house," said Ralph. "You will be disappointed if you count on that. It's dismally prosaic; there is no romance here but what you may have brought with you."

"I have brought a great deal; but it seems to me I have brought it to the right place."

"To keep it out of harm, certainly; nothing will ever happen to it here, between my father and me."

Isabel looked at him a moment.

"Is there never any one here but your father and you?"

"My mother, of course."

"Oh, I know your mother; she is not romantic. Haven't you other people?"

"Very few."

"I am sorry for that; I like so much to see people."

"Oh, we will invite all the county to amuse you," said Ralph.

"Now you are making fun of me," the girl answered, rather gravely. "Who was the gentleman that was on the lawn when I arrived?"

"A county neighbour; he doesn't come very often."

"I am sorry for that; I liked him," said Isabel.

"Why, it seemed to me that you barely spoke to him," Ralph objected.

"Never mind, I like him all the same. I like your father, too, immensely."

"You can't do better than that; he is a dear old man."

"I am so sorry he is ill," said Isabel.

"You must help me to nurse him; you ought to be a good nurse."

"I don't think I am; I have been told I am not; I am said to be too theoretic. But you haven't told me about the ghost," she added.

Ralph, however, gave no heed to this observation.

"You like my father, and you like Lord Warburton. I infer also that you like my mother."

"I like your mother very much, because—because——" And Isabel found herself attempting to assign a reason for her affection for Mrs. Touchett.

"Ah, we never know why!" said her companion, laughing.

"I always know why," the girl answered. "It's because she doesn't expect one to like her; she doesn't care whether one does or not."

"So you adore her, out of perversity? Well, I take greatly after my mother," said Ralph.

"I don't believe you do at all. You wish people to like you, and you try to make them do it."

"Good heavens, how you see through one!" cried Ralph, with a dismay that was not altogether jocular.

"But I like you all the same," his cousin went on. "The way to clinch the matter will be to show me the ghost."

Ralph shook his head sadly. "I might show it to you, but you would never see it. The privilege isn't given to every one; it's not enviable. It has never been seen by a young,

happy innocent person like you. You must have suffered first, have suffered greatly, have gained some miserable knowledge. In that way your eyes are opened to it. I saw it long ago," said Ralph, smiling.

"I told you just now I was very fond of knowledge," the girl answered.

"Yes, of happy knowledge—of pleasant knowledge. But you haven't suffered, and you are not made to suffer. I hope you will never see the ghost!"

Isabel had listened to him attentively, with a smile on her lips, but with a certain gravity in her eyes. Charming as he found her, she had struck him as rather presumptuous—indeed it was a part of her charm; and he wondered what she would say.

"I am not afraid," she said; which seemed quite presumptuous enough.

"You are not afraid of suffering?"

"Yes, I am afraid of suffering. But I am not afraid of ghosts. And I think people suffer too easily," she added.

"I don't believe you do," said Ralph, looking at her with his hands in his pockets.

"I don't think that's a fault," she answered. "It is not absolutely necessary to suffer; we were not made for that."

"You were not, certainly."

"I am not speaking of myself." And she turned away a little.

"No, it isn't a fault," said her cousin. "It's a merit to be strong."

"Only, if you don't suffer, they call you hard," Isabel remarked. They passed out of the smaller drawing-room, into which they had returned from the gallery, and paused in the hall, at the foot of the staircase. Here Ralph presented his companion with her bed-room candle, which he had taken from a niche. "Never mind what they call you," he said. "When you do suffer, they call you an idiot. The great point is to be as happy as possible."

She looked at him a little; she had taken her candle, and placed her foot on the oaken stair. "Well," she said, "that's what I came to Europe for, to be as happy as possible. Good night."

"Good night! I wish you all success, and shall be very glad to contribute to it!"

She turned away, and he watched her, as she slowly ascended. Then, with his hands always in his pockets, he went back to the empty drawing-room.

CHAPTER VI

ISABEL ARCHER was a young person of many theories; her imagination was remarkably active. It had been her fortune to possess a finer mind than most of the persons among whom her lot was cast; to have a larger perception of surrounding facts, and to care for knowledge that was tinged with the unfamiliar. It is true that among her contemporaries she passed for a young woman of extraordinary profundity; for these excellent people never withheld their admiration from a reach of intellect of which they themselves were not conscious, and spoke of Isabel as a prodigy of learning, a young lady reputed to have read the classic authors—in translations. Her paternal aunt, Mrs. Varian, once spread the rumour that Isabel was writing a book—Mrs. Varian having a reverence for books—and averred that Isabel would distinguish herself in print. Mrs. Varian thought highly of literature, for which she entertained that esteem that is connected with a sense of privation. Her own large house, remarkable for its assortment of mosaic tables and decorated ceilings, was unfurnished with a library, and in the way of printed volumes, contained nothing but half-a-dozen novels in paper, on a shelf in the apartment of one of the Miss Varians. Practically, Mrs. Varian's acquaintance with literature was confined to the *New York Interviewer;* as she very justly said, after you had read the *Interviewer,* you had no time for anything else. Her tendency, however, was rather to keep the *Interviewer* out of the way of her daughters; she was determined to bring them up seriously, and they read nothing at all. Her impression with regard to Isabel's labours was quite illusory; the girl never attempted to write a book, and had no desire to be an authoress. She had no talent for expression, and had none of the consciousness of genius; she only had a general idea that people were right when they treated her as if she were

rather superior. Whether or no she were superior, people were right in admiring her if they thought her so; for it seemed to her often that her mind moved more quickly than theirs, and this encouraged an impatience that might easily be confounded with superiority. It may be affirmed without delay that Isabel was probably very liable to the sin of self-esteem; she often surveyed with complacency the field of her own nature; she was in the habit of taking for granted, on scanty evidence, that she was right; impulsively, she often admired herself. Meanwhile her errors and delusions were frequently such as a biographer interested in preserving the dignity of his heroine must shrink from specifying. Her thoughts were a tangle of vague outlines, which had never been corrected by the judgment of people who seemed to her to speak with authority. In matters of opinion she had had her own way, and it had led her into a thousand ridiculous zigzags. Every now and then she found out she was wrong, and then she treated herself to a week of passionate humility. After this she held her head higher than ever again; for it was of no use, she had an unquenchable desire to think well of herself. She had a theory that it was only on this condition that life was worth living; that one should be one of the best, should be conscious of a fine organization (she could not help knowing her organization was fine), should move in a realm of light, of natural wisdom, of happy impulse, of inspiration gracefully chronic. It was almost as unnecessary to cultivate doubt of oneself as to cultivate doubt of one's best friend; one should try to be one's own best friend, and to give oneself, in this manner, distinguished company. The girl had a certain nobleness of imagination which rendered her a good many services and played her a great many tricks. She spent half her time in thinking of beauty, and bravery, and magnanimity; she had a fixed determination to regard the world as a place of brightness, of free expansion, of irresistible action; she thought it would be detestable to be afraid or ashamed. She had an infinite hope that she should never do anything wrong. She had resented so strongly, after discovering them, her mere errors of feeling (the discovery always made her tremble,

as if she had escaped from a trap which might have caught her and smothered her), that the chance of inflicting a sensible injury upon another person, presented only as a contingency, caused her at moments to hold her breath. That always seemed to her the worst thing that could happen to one. On the whole, reflectively, she was in no uncertainty about the things that were wrong. She had no taste for thinking of them, but whenever she looked at them fixedly she recognized them. It was wrong to be mean, to be jealous, to be false, to be cruel; she had seen very little of the evil of the world, but she had seen women who lied and who tried to hurt each other. Seeing such things had quickened her high spirit; it seemed right to scorn them. Of course the danger of a high spirit is the danger of inconsistency—the danger of keeping up the flag after the place has surrendered; a sort of behaviour so anomalous as to be almost a dishonour to the flag. But Isabel, who knew little of the sorts of artillery to which young ladies are exposed, flattered herself that such contradictions would never be observed in her own conduct. Her life should always be in harmony with the most pleasing impression she should produce; she would be what she appeared, and she would appear what she was. Sometimes she went so far as to wish that she should find herself some day in a difficult position, so that she might have the pleasure of being as heroic as the occasion demanded. Altogether, with her meagre knowledge, her inflated ideals, her confidence at once innocent and dogmatic, her temper at once exacting and indulgent, her mixture of curiosity and fastidiousness, of vivacity and indifference, her desire to look very well and to be if possible even better; her determination to see, to try, to know; her combination of the delicate, desultory, flame-like spirit and the eager and personal young girl; she would be an easy victim of scientific criticism, if she were not intended to awaken on the reader's part an impulse more tender and more purely expectant.

It was one of her theories that Isabel Archer was very fortunate in being independent, and that she ought to make some very enlightened use of her independence. She never

called it loneliness; she thought that weak; and besides, her sister Lily constantly urged her to come and stay with her. She had a friend whose acquaintance she had made shortly before her father's death, who offered so laudable an example of useful activity that Isabel always thought of her as a model. Henrietta Stackpole had the advantage of a remarkable talent; she was thoroughly launched in journalism, and her letters to the *Interviewer*, from Washington, Newport, the White Mountains, and other places, were universally admired. Isabel did not accept them unrestrictedly, but she esteemed the courage, energy, and good-humour of her friend, who, without parents and without property, had adopted three of the children of an infirm and widowed sister, and was paying their school-bills out of the proceeds of her literary labour. Henrietta was a great radical, and had clear-cut views on most subjects; her cherished desire had long been to come to Europe and write a series of letters to the *Interviewer* from the radical point of view—an enterprise the less difficult as she knew perfectly in advance what her opinions would be, and to how many objections most European institutions lay open. When she heard that Isabel was coming, she wished to start at once; thinking, naturally, that it would be delightful the two should travel together. She had been obliged, however, to postpone this enterprise. She thought Isabel a glorious creature, and had spoken of her, covertly, in some of her letters, though she never mentioned the fact to her friend, who would not have taken pleasure in it and was not a regular reader of the *Interviewer*. Henrietta, for Isabel, was chiefly a proof that a woman might suffice to herself and be happy. Her resources were of the obvious kind; but even if one had not the journalistic talent and a genius for guessing, as Henrietta said, what the public was going to want, one was not therefore to conclude that one had no vocation, no beneficent aptitude of any sort, and resign oneself to being trivial and superficial Isabel was resolutely determined not to be superficial. If one should wait expectantly and trustfully, one would find some happy work to one's hand. Of course, among her theories, this young lady was not without a collection of opinions on the question of marriage. The first on the list was a conviction

that it was very vulgar to think too much about it. From lapsing into a state of eagerness on this point she earnestly prayed that she might be delivered; she held that a woman ought to be able to make up her life in singleness, and that it was perfectly possible to be happy without the society of a more or less coarse-minded person of another sex. The girl's prayer was very sufficiently answered; something pure and proud that there was in her—something cold and stiff, an unappreciated suitor with a taste for analysis might have called it—had hitherto kept her from any great vanity of conjecture on the subject of possible husbands. Few of the men she saw seemed worth an expenditure of imagination, and it made her smile to think that one of them should present himself as an incentive to hope and a reward of patience. Deep in her soul—it was the deepest thing there—lay a belief that if a certain light should dawn, she could give herself completely; but this image, on the whole, was too formidable to be attractive. Isabel's thoughts hovered about it, but they seldom rested on it long; after a little it ended by frightening her. It often seemed to her that she thought too much about herself; you could have made her blush, any day in the year, by telling her that she was selfish. She was always planning out her own development, desiring her own perfection, observing her own progress. Her nature had for her own imagination a certain garden-like quality, a suggestion of perfume and murmuring boughs, of shady bowers and lengthening vistas, which made her feel that introspection was, after all, an exercise in the open air, and that a visit to the recesses of one's mind was harmless when one returned from it with a lapful of roses. But she was often reminded that there were other gardens in the world than those of her virginal soul, and that there were, moreover, a great many places that were not gardens at all—only dusky, pestiferous tracts, planted thick with ugliness and misery. In the current of that easy eagerness on which she had lately been floating, which had conveyed her to this beautiful old England and might carry her much further still, she often checked herself with the thought of the thousands of people who were less happy than herself—a thought which for the moment made her absorbing happiness appear to her a kind of immodesty. What should one

do with the misery of the world in a scheme of the agreeable for oneself? It must be confessed that this question never held her long. She was too young, too impatient to live, too unacquainted with pain. She always returned to her theory that a young woman whom after all every one thought clever, should begin by getting a general impression of life. This was necessary to prevent mistakes, and after it should be secured she might make the unfortunate condition of others an object of special attention.

England was a revelation to her, and she found herself as entertained as a child at a pantomime. In her infantine excursions to Europe she had seen only the Continent, and seen it from the nursery window; Paris, not London, was her father's Mecca. The impressions of that time, moreover, had become faint and remote, and the old-world quality in everything that she now saw had all the charm of strangeness. Her uncle's house seemed a picture made real; no refinement of the agreeable was lost upon Isabel; the rich perfection of Gardencourt at once revealed a world and gratified a need. The large, low rooms, with brown ceilings and dusky corners, the deep embrasures and curious casements, the quiet light on dark, polished panels, the deep greenness outside, that seemed always peeping in, the sense of well-ordered privacy, in the centre of a "property"—a place where sounds were felicitously accidental, where the tread was muffled by the earth itself, and in the thick mild air all shrillness dropped out of conversation—these things were much to the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions. She formed a fast friendship with her uncle, and often sat by his chair when he had had it moved out to the lawn. He passed hours in the open air, sitting placidly with folded hands, like a good old man who had done his work and received his wages, and was trying to grow used to weeks and months made up only of off-days. Isabel amused him more than she suspected—the effect she produced upon people was often different from what she supposed—and he frequently gave himself the pleasure of making her chatter. It was by this term that he qualified her conversation, which had much of the vivacity observable in that of the young ladies of her country, to whom the ear of the world is more directly

presented than to their sisters in other lands. Like the majority of American girls, Isabel had been encouraged to express herself; her remarks had been attended to; she had been expected to have emotions and opinions. Many of her opinions had doubtless but a slender value, many of her emotions passed away in the utterance; but they had left a trace in giving her the habit of seeming at least to feel and think, and in imparting, moreover, to her words, when she was really moved, that artless vividness which so many people had regarded as a sign of superiority. Mr. Touchett used to think that she reminded him of his wife when his wife was in her teens. It was because she was fresh and natural and quick to understand, to speak—so many characteristics of her niece—that he had fallen in love with Mrs. Touchett. He never expressed this analogy to the girl herself, however; for if Mrs. Touchett had once been like Isabel, Isabel was not at all like Mrs. Touchett. The old man was full of kindness for her! it was a long time, as he said, since they had had any young life in the house; and our rustling, quickly-moving, clear-voiced heroine was as agreeable to his sense as the sound of flowing water. He wished to do something for her, he wished she would ask something of him. But Isabel asked nothing but questions; it is true that of these she asked a great many. Her uncle had a great fund of answers, though interrogation sometimes came in forms that puzzled him. She questioned him immensely about England, about the British constitution, the English character, the state of politics, the manners and customs of the royal family, the peculiarities of the aristocracy, the way of living and thinking of his neighbours; and in asking to be enlightened on these points she usually inquired whether they correspond with the descriptions in the books. The old man always looked at her a little, with his fine dry smile, while he smoothed down the shawl that was spread across his legs.

"The books?" he once said; "well, I don't know much about the books. You must ask Ralph about that. I have always ascertained for myself—got my information in the natural form. I never asked many questions even; I just kept quiet and took notice. Of course, I have had very good opportunities—better than what a young lady would naturally

have. I am of an inquisitive disposition, though you mightn't think it if you were to watch me; however much you might watch me, I should be watching you more. I have been watching these people for upwards of thirty-five years, and I don't hesitate to say that I have acquired considerable information. It's a very fine country on the whole—finer perhaps than what we give it credit for on the other side. There are several improvements that I should like to see introduced; but the necessity of them doesn't seem to be generally felt as yet. When the necessity of a thing is generally felt, they usually manage to accomplish it; but they seem to feel pretty comfortable about waiting till then. I certainly feel more at home among them than I expected to when I first came over; I suppose it's because I have had a considerable degree of success. When you are successful you naturally feel more at home."

"Do you suppose that if I am successful I shall feel at home?" Isabel asked.

"I should think it very probable, and you certainly will be successful. They like American young ladies very much over here; they show them a great deal of kindness. But you mustn't feel too much at home, you know."

"Oh, I am by no means sure I shall like it," said Isabel, somewhat judicially. "I like the place very much, but I am not sure I shall like the people."

"The people are very good people; especially if you like them."

"I have no doubt they are good," Isabel rejoined; "but are they pleasant in society? They won't rob me nor beat me; but will they make themselves agreeable to me? That's what I like people to do. I don't hesitate to say so, because I always appreciate it. I don't believe they are very nice to girls; they are not nice to them in the novels."

"I don't know about the novels," said Mr. Touchett. "I believe the novels have a great deal of ability, but I don't suppose they are very accurate. We once had a lady who wrote novels staying here; she was a friend of Ralph's, and he asked her down. She was very positive, very positive; but she was not the sort of person that you could depend on her testimony. Too much imagination—I suppose, that was

it. She afterwards published a work of fiction in which she was understood to have given a representation—something in the nature of a caricature, as you might say—of my unworthy self. I didn't read it, but Ralph just handed me the book, with the principal passages marked. It was understood to be a description of my conversation; American peculiarities, nasal twang, Yankee notions, stars and stripes. Well, it was not at all accurate; she couldn't have listened very attentively. I had no objection to her giving a report of my conversation, if she liked; but I didn't like the idea that she hadn't taken the trouble to listen to it. Of course I talk like an American—I can't talk like a Hottentot. However I talk, I have made them understand me pretty well over here. But I don't talk like the old gentleman in that lady's novel. He wasn't an American; we wouldn't have him over there! I just mention that fact to show you that they are not always accurate. Of course, as I have no daughters, and as Mrs. Touchett resides in Florence, I haven't had much chance to notice about the young ladies. It sometimes appears as if the young women in the lower class were not very well treated; but I guess their position is better in the upper class."

"Dear me!" Isabel exclaimed; "how many classes have they? About fifty, I suppose."

"Well, I don't know that I ever counted them. I never took much notice of the classes. That's the advantage of being an American here; you don't belong to any class."

"I hope so," said Isabel. "Imagine one's belonging to an English class!"

"Well, I guess some of them are pretty comfortable—especially towards the top. But for me there are only two classes: the people I trust, and the people I don't. Of those two, my dear Isabel, you belong to the first."

"I am much obliged to you," said the young girl, quickly. Her way of taking compliments seemed sometimes rather dry; she got rid of them as rapidly as possible. But as regards this, she was sometimes misjudged; she was thought insensible to them, whereas in fact she was simply unwilling to show how infinitely they pleased her. To show that was to show too much. "I am sure the English are very conventional," she added.

"They have got everything pretty well fixed," Mr. Touchett admitted. "It's all settled beforehand—they don't leave it to the last moment."

"I don't like to have anything settled beforehand," said the girl. "I like unexpectedness."

Her uncle seemed amused at her distinctness of preference. "Well, it's settled beforehand that you will have great success," he rejoined. "I suppose you will like that."

"I shall not have success if they are conventional. I am not in the least conventional. I am just the contrary. That's what they won't like."

"No, no, you are all wrong," said the old man. "You can't tell what they will like. They are very inconsistent; that's their principal interest."

"Ah well," said Isabel, standing before her uncle with her hands clasped about the belt of her black dress, and looking up and down the lawn—"that will suit me perfectly!"

CHAPTER VII

THE two amused themselves, time and again, with talking of the attitude of the British public, as if the young lady had been in a position to appeal to it; but in fact the British public remained for the present profoundly indifferent to Miss Isabel Archer, whose fortune had dropped her, as her cousin said, into the dullest house in England. Her gouty uncle received very little company, and Mrs. Touchett, not having cultivated relations with her husband's neighbours, was not warranted in expecting visits from them.

She had, however, a peculiar taste; she liked to receive cards. For what is usually called social intercourse she had very little relish; but nothing pleased her more than to find her hall-table whitened with oblong morsels of symbolic pasteboard. She flattered herself that she was a very just woman, and had mastered the sovereign truth that nothing in this world is got for nothing. She had played no social part as mistress of Gardencourt, and it was not to be supposed that, in the surrounding country, a minute account should be kept of her comings and goings. But it is by no means certain that she did not feel it to be wrong that so little notice was taken of them, and that her failure (really very gratuitous) to make herself important in the neighbourhood, had not much to do with the acrimony of her allusions to her husband's adopted country. Isabel presently found herself in the singular situation of defending the British constitution against her aunt; Mrs. Touchett having formed the habit of sticking pins into this venerable instrument. Isabel always felt an impulse to pull out the pins; not that she imagined they inflicted any damage on the tough old parchment, but because it seemed to her that her aunt might make better use of her sharpness. She was very critical herself—it was incidental to her age, her sex, and her nationality; but she was very sentimental as well, and there was some-

thing in Mrs. Touchett's dryness that set her own moral fountains flowing.

"Now what is your point of view?" she asked of her aunt. "When you criticise everything here, you should have a point of view. Yours doesn't seem to be American—you thought everything over there so disagreeable. When I criticise, I have mine; it's thoroughly American!"

"My dear young lady," said Mrs. Touchett, "there are as many points of view in the world as there are people of sense. You may say that doesn't make them very numerous! American? Never in the world; that's shockingly narrow. My point of view, thank God, is personal!"

Isabel thought this a better answer than she admitted; it was a tolerable description of her own manner of judging, but it would not have sounded well for her to say so. On the lips of a person less advanced in life, and less enlightened by experience than Mrs. Touchett, such a declaration would savour of immodesty, even of arrogance. She risked it nevertheless, in talking with Ralph, with whom she talked a great deal, and with whom her conversation was of a sort that gave a large licence to violent statements. Her cousin used, as the phrase is, to chaff her; he very soon established with her a reputation for treating everything as a joke, and he was not a man to neglect the privileges such a reputation conferred. She accused him of an odious want of seriousness, of laughing at all things, beginning with himself. Such slender faculty of reverence as he possessed centred wholly upon his father; for the rest, he exercised his wit indiscriminately upon father's son, this gentleman's weak lungs, his useless life, his anomalous mother, his friends (Lord Warburton in especial), his adopted and his native country, his charming new-found cousin. "I keep a band of music in my ante-room," he said once to her. "It has orders to play without stopping; it renders me two excellent services. It keeps the sounds of the world from reaching the private apartments, and it makes the world think that dancing is going on within." It was dance-music indeed that you usually heard when you came within ear-shot of Ralph's band; the liveliest waltzes seemed to float upon the air. Isabel often found herself irritated by this perpetual fiddling; she would

have liked to pass through the ante-room, as her cousin called it, and enter the private apartments. It mattered little that he had assured her that they were a very dismal place; she would have been glad to undertake to sweep them and set them in order. It was but half-hospitality to let her remain outside; to punish him for which, Isabel administered innumerable taps with the ferrule of her straight young wit. It must be said that her wit was exercised to a large extent in self-defence, for her cousin amused himself with calling her "Columbia," and accusing her of a patriotism so fervid that it scorched. He drew a caricature of her, in which she was represented as a very pretty young woman, dressed, in the height of the prevailing fashion, in the folds of the national banner. Isabel's chief dread in life, at this period of her development, was that she should appear narrow-minded; what she feared next afterwards was that she should be so. But she nevertheless made no scruple of abounding in her cousin's sense, and pretending to sigh for the charms of her native land. She would be as American as it pleased him to regard her, and if he chose to laugh at her, she would give him plenty of occupation. She defended England against his mother, but when Ralph sang its praises, on purpose, as she said, to torment her, she found herself able to differ from him on a variety of points. In fact, the quality of this small ripe country seemed as sweet to her as the taste of an October pear; and her satisfaction was at the root of the good spirits which enabled her to take her cousin's chaff and return it in kind. If her good-humour flagged at moments, it was not because she thought herself ill-used, but because she suddenly felt sorry for Ralph. It seemed to her that he was talking as a blind and had little heart in what he said.

"I don't know what is the matter with you," she said to him once; "but I suspect you are a great humbug."

"That's your privilege," Ralph answered, who had not been used to being so crudely addressed.

"I don't know what you care for; I don't think you care for anything. You don't really care for England when you praise it; you don't care for America even when you pretend to abuse it."

"I care for nothing but you, dear cousin," said Ralph.

"If I could believe even that, I should be very glad."

"Ah, well, I should hope so!" the young man exclaimed.

Isabel might have believed it, and not have been far from the truth. He thought a great deal about her; she was constantly present to his mind. At a time when his thoughts had been a good deal of a burden to him, her sudden arrival, which promised nothing and was an open-handed gift of fate, had refreshed and quickened them, given them wings and something to fly for. Poor Ralph for many weeks had been steeped in melancholy; his out-look, habitually sombre, lay under the shadow of a deeper cloud. He had grown anxious about his father, whose gout, hitherto confined to his legs, had begun to ascend into regions more vital. The old man had been gravely ill in the spring, and the doctors had whispered to Ralph that another attack would be less easy to deal with. Just now he appeared tolerably comfortable, but Ralph could not rid himself of a suspicion that this was a subterfuge of the enemy, who was waiting to take him off his guard. If the manœuvre should succeed, there would be little hope of any great resistance. Ralph had always taken for granted that his father would survive him—that his own name would be the first called. The father and son had been close companions, and the idea of being left alone with the remnant of a tasteless life on his hands was not gratifying to the young man, who had always and tacitly counted upon his elder's help in making the best of a poor business. At the prospect of losing his great motive, Ralph was indeed mightily disgusted. If they might die at the same time, it would be all very well; but without the encouragement of his father's society he should barely have patience to await his own turn. He had not the incentive of feeling that he was indispensable to his mother; it was a rule with his mother to have no regrets. He bethought himself, of course, that it had been a small kindness to his father to wish that, of the two, the active rather than the passive party should know the pain of loss; he remembered that the old man had always treated his own forecast of an uncompleted career as a clever fallacy, which he should be delighted to discredit so far as he might by dying first. But of the two triumphs, that of refuting a sophistical son and that of holding on a while longer to a

state of being which, with all abatements, he enjoyed, Ralph deemed it no sin to hope that the latter might be vouchsafed to Mr. Touchett.

These were nice questions, but Isabel's arrival put a stop to his puzzling over them. It even suggested that there might be a compensation for the intolerable ennui of surviving his genial sire. He wondered whether he were falling in love with this spontaneous young woman from Albany; but he decided that on the whole he was not. After he had known her for a week, he quite made up his mind to this, and every day he felt a little more sure. Lord Warburton had been right about her; she was a thoroughly interesting woman. Ralph wondered how Lord Warburton had found it out so soon; and then he said it was only another proof of his friend's high abilities, which he had always greatly admired. If his cousin were to be nothing more than an entertainment to him, Ralph was conscious that she was an entertainment of a high order. "A character like that," he said to himself, "is the finest thing in nature. It is finer than the finest work of art—than a Greek bas-relief, than a great Titian, than a Gothic cathedral. It is very pleasant to be so well-treated where one least looked for it. I had never been more blue, more bored, than for a week before she came; I had never expected less that something agreeable would happen. Suddenly I received a Titian, by the post, to hang on my wall—a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney-piece. The key of a beautiful edifice is thrust into my hand, and I am told to walk in and admire. My poor boy, you have been sadly ungrateful, and now you had better keep very quiet and never grumble again." The sentiment of these reflections was very just; but it was not exactly true that Ralph Touchett had had a key put into his hand. His cousin was a very brilliant girl, who would take, as he said, a good deal of knowing; but she needed the knowing, and his attitude with regard to her, though it was contemplative and critical, was not judicial. He surveyed the edifice from the outside, and admired it greatly; he looked in at the windows, and received an impression of proportions equally fair. But he felt that he saw it only by glimpses, and that he had not yet stood under the roof. The door was fastened, and though he had keys in his

pocket he had a conviction that none of them would fit. She was intelligent and generous; it was a fine free nature; but what was she going to do with herself? This question was irregular, for with most women one had no occasion to ask it. Most women did with themselves nothing at all; they waited, in attitudes more or less gracefully passive, for a man to come that way and furnish them with a destiny. Isabel's originality was that she gave one an impression of having intentions of her own. "Whenever she executes them," said Ralph, "may I be there to see!"

It devolved upon him of course to do the honours of the place. Mr. Touchett was confined to his chair, and his wife's position was that of a rather grim visitor; so that in the line of conduct that opened itself to Ralph, duty and inclination were harmoniously mingled. He was not a great walker, but he strolled about the grounds with his cousin—a pastime for which the weather remained favourable with a persistency not allowed for in Isabel's somewhat lugubrious prevision of the climate; and in the long afternoons, of which the length was but the measure of her gratified eagerness, they took a boat on the river, the dear little river, as Isabel called it, where the opposite shore seemed still a part of the foreground of the landscape; or drove over the country in a phaeton—a low, capacious, thick-wheeled phaeton formerly much used by Mr. Touchett, but which he had now ceased to enjoy. Isabel enjoyed it largely, and, handling the reins in a manner which approved itself to the groom as "knowing," was never weary of driving her uncle's capital horses through winding lanes and byways full of the rural incidents she had confidently expected to find; past cottages thatched and timbered, past ale-houses latticed and sanded, past patches of ancient common and glimpses of empty parks, between hedgerows made thick by midsummer. When they reached home, they usually found that tea had been served upon the lawn, and that Mrs. Touchett had not absolved herself from the obligation of handing her husband his cup. But the two for the most part sat silent; the old man with his head back and his eyes closed, his wife occupied with her knitting, and wearing that appearance of extraordinary meditation with which some ladies contemplate the movement of their needles.

One day, however, a visitor had arrived. The two young people, after spending an hour upon the river, strolled back to the house and perceived Lord Warburton sitting under the trees and engaged in conversation of which even at a distance the desultory character was appreciable, with Mrs. Touchett. He had driven over from his own place with a portmanteau, and had asked, as the father and son often invited him to do, for a dinner and a lodging. Isabel, seeing him for half-an-hour on the day of her arrival, had discovered in this brief space that she liked him; he had made indeed a tolerably vivid impression on her mind, and she had thought of him several times. She had hoped that she should see him again—hoped too that she should see a few others. Gardencourt was not dull; the place itself was so delightful, her uncle was such a perfection of an uncle, and Ralph was so unlike any cousin she had ever encountered—her view of cousins being rather monotonous. Then her impressions were still so fresh and so quickly renewed that there was as yet hardly a sense of vacancy in the prospect. But Isabel had need to remind herself that she was interested in human nature, and that her foremost hope in coming abroad had been that she should see a great many people. When Ralph said to her, as he had done several times—"I wonder you find this endurable; you ought to see some of the neighbours and some of our friends—because we have really got a few, though you would never suppose it"—when he offered to invite what he called a "lot of people," and make the young girl acquainted with English society, she encouraged the hospitable impulse and promised, in advance, to be delighted. Little, however, for the present, had come of Ralph's offers, and it may be confided to the reader that, if the young man delayed to carry them out, it was because he found the labour of entertaining his cousin by no means so severe as to require extraneous help. Isabel had spoken to him very often about "specimens"; it was a word that played a considerable part in her vocabulary; she had given him to understand that she wished to see English society illustrated by figures.

"Well now, there's a specimen," he said to her, as they walked up from the river-side, and he recognized Lord Warburton.

"A specimen of what?" asked the girl.

"A specimen of an English gentleman."

"Do you mean they are all like him?"

"Oh no; they are not all like him."

"He's a favourable specimen, then," said Isabel; because I am sure he is good."

"Yes, he is very good. And he is very fortunate."

The fortunate Lord Warburton exchanged a handshake with our heroine, and hoped she was very well. "But I needn't ask that," he said, "since you have been handling the oars."

"I have been rowing a little," Isabel answered; "but how should you know it?"

"Oh, I know *he* doesn't row; he's too lazy," said his lordship, indicating Ralph Touchett, with a laugh.

"He has a good excuse for his laziness," Isabel rejoined, lowering her voice a little.

"Ah, he has a good excuse for everything!" cried Lord Warburton, still with his deep, agreeable laugh.

"My excuse for not rowing is that my cousin rows so well," said Ralph. "She does everything well. She touches nothing that she doesn't adorn!"

"It makes one want to be touched, Miss Archer," Lord Warburton declared.

"Be touched in the right sense, and you will never look the worse for it," said Isabel, who, if it pleased her to hear it said that her accomplishments were numerous, was happily able to reflect that such complacency was not the indication of a feeble mind, inasmuch as there were several things in which she excelled. Her desire to think well of herself always needed to be supported by proof; though it is possible that this fact is not the sign of a milder egotism.

Lord Warburton not only spent the night at Gardencourt, but he was persuaded to remain over the second day; and when the second day was ended, he determined to postpone his departure till the morrow. During this period he addressed much of his conversation to Isabel, who accepted this evidence of his esteem with a very good grace. She found herself liking him extremely; the first impression he had made upon her was pleasant, but at the end of an evening spent in

his society she thought him quite one of the most delectable persons she had met. She retired to rest with a sense of good fortune, with a quickened consciousness of the pleasantness of life. "It's very nice to know two such charming people as those," she said, meaning by "those" her cousin and her cousin's friend. It must be added, moreover, that an incident had occurred which might have seemed to put her good humour to the test. Mr. Touchett went to bed at half-past nine o'clock, but his wife remained in the drawing-room with the other members of the party. She prolonged her vigil for something less than an hour, and then rising, she said to Isabel that it was time they should bid the gentlemen good-night. Isabel had as yet no desire to go to bed; the occasion wore, to her sense, a festive character, and feasts were not in the habit of terminating so early. So, without further thought, she replied, very simply—

"Need I go, dear aunt? I will come up in half-an-hour."

"It's impossible I should wait for you," Mrs. Touchett answered.

"Ah, you needn't wait? Ralph will light my candle," said Isabel, smiling.

"I will light your candle; do let me light your candle, Miss Archer!" Lord Warburton exclaimed. "Only I beg it shall not be before midnight."

Mrs. Touchett fixed her bright little eyes upon him for a moment, and then transferred them to her niece.

"You can't stay alone with the gentlemen. You are not—you are not at Albany, my dear."

Isabel rose, blushing.

"I wish I were," she said.

"Oh, I say, mother!" Ralph broke out.

"My dear Mrs. Touchett," Lord Warburton murmured.

"I didn't make your country, my lord," Mrs. Touchett said majestically. "I must take it as I find it."

"Can't I stay with my own cousin?" Isabel inquired.

"I am not aware that Lord Warburton is your cousin."

"Perhaps I had better go to bed!" the visitor exclaimed. "That will arrange it."

Mrs. Touchett gave a little look of despair, and sat down again.

"Oh, if it's necessary, I will stay up till midnight," she said.

Ralph meanwhile handed Isabel her candlestick. He had been watching her; it had seemed to him that her temper was stirred—an accident that might be interesting. But if he had expected an exhibition of temper, he was disappointed, for the girl simply laughed a little, nodded good night, and withdrew accompanied by her aunt. For himself he was annoyed at his mother, though he thought she was right. Above-stairs, the two ladies separated at Mrs. Touchett's door. Isabel had said nothing on her way up.

"Of course you are displeased at my interfering with you," said Mrs. Touchett.

Isabel reflected a moment.

"I am not displeased, but I am surprised—and a good deal puzzled. Was it not proper I should remain in the drawing-room?"

"Not in the least. Young girls here don't sit alone with the gentlemen late at night."

"You are very right to tell me then," said Isabel. "I don't understand it, but I am very glad to know it."

"I shall always tell you," her aunt answered, "whenever I see you taking what seems to be too much liberty."

"Pray do; but I don't say I shall always think your remonstrance just."

"Very likely not. You are too fond of your liberty."

"Yes, I think I am very fond of it. But I always want to know the things one shouldn't do."

"So as to do them?" asked her aunt.

"So as to choose," said Isabel.

CHAPTER VIII

AS she was much interested in the picturesque, Lord Warburton ventured to express a hope that she would come some day and see his house, which was a very curious old place. He extracted from Mrs. Touchett a promise that she would bring her niece to Lockleigh, and Ralph signified his willingness to attend upon the ladies if his father should be able to spare him. Lord Warburton assured our heroine that in the mean time his sisters would come and see her. She knew something about his sisters, having interrogated him, during the hours they spent together while he was at Gardencourt, on many points connected with his family. When Isabel was interested, she asked a great many questions, and as her companion was a copious talker, she asked him on this occasion by no means in vain. He told her that he had four sisters and two brothers, and had lost both his parents. The brothers and sisters were very good people—"not particularly clever, you know," he said, "but simple and respectable and trustworthy;" and he was so good as to hope that Miss Archer should know them well. One of the brothers was in the Church, settled in the parsonage at Lockleigh, which was rather a largeish parish, and was an excellent fellow, in spite of his thinking differently from himself on every conceivable topic. And then Lord Warburton mentioned some of the opinions held by his brother, which were opinions that Isabel had often heard expressed and that she supposed to be entertained by a considerable portion of the human family. Many of them, indeed, she supposed she had held herself, till he assured her that she was quite mistaken, that it was really impossible, that she had doubtless imagined she entertained them, but that she might depend that, if she thought them over a little, she would find there was nothing in them. When she answered that she had already thought several of them over very attentively, he declared that she was only another example of what he had

often been struck with—the fact that, of all the people in the world, the Americans were the most grossly superstitious. They were rank Tories and bigots, every one of them; there were no conservatives like American conservatives. Her uncle and her cousin were there to prove it; nothing could be more mediæval than many of their views; they had ideas that people in England now-a-days were ashamed to confess to; and they had the impudence, moreover, said his lordship, laughing, to pretend they know more about the needs and dangers of this poor dear stupid old England than he who was born in it and owned a considerable part of it—the more shame to him! From all of which Isabel gathered that Lord Warburton was a nobleman of the newest pattern, a reformer, a radical, a contemner of ancient ways. His other brother, who was in the army in India, was rather wild and pig-headed, and had not been of much use as yet but to make debts for Warburton to pay—one of the most precious privileges of an elder brother. "I don't think I will pay any more," said Warburton; "he lives a monstrous deal better than I do, enjoys unheard-of luxuries, and thinks himself a much finer gentleman than I. As I am a consistent radical, I go in only for equality; I don't go in for the superiority of the younger brothers." Two of his four sisters, the second and fourth, were married, one of them having done very well, as they said, the other only so-so. The husband of the elder, Lord Haycock, was a very good fellow, but unfortunately a horrid Tory; and his wife, like all good English wives, was worse than her husband. The other had espoused a smallish squire in Norfolk, and, though she was married only the other day, had already five children. This information, and much more, Lord Warburton imparted to his young American listener, taking pains to make many things clear and to lay bare to her apprehension the peculiarities of English life. Isabel was often amused at his explicitness and at the small allowance he seemed to make either for her own experience or for her imagination. "He thinks I am a barbarian," she said, "and that I have never seen forks and spoons;" and she used to ask him artless questions for the pleasure of hearing him answer seriously. Then when he had fallen into the trap—"It's a pity you can't

see me in my war-paint and feathers," she remarked; "if I had known how kind you are to the poor savages, I would have brought over my national costume!" Lord Warburton had travelled through the United States, and knew much more about them than Isabel; he was so good as to say that America was the most charming country in the world, but his recollections of it appeared to encourage the idea that Americans in England would need to have a great many things explained to them. "If I had only had you to explain things to me in America!" he said. "I was rather puzzled in your country; in fact, I was quite bewildered, and the trouble was that the explanations only puzzled me more. You know I think they often gave me the wrong ones on purpose; they are rather clever about that over there. But when I explain, you can trust me; about what I tell you there is no mistake."

There was no mistake at least about his being very intelligent and cultivated, and knowing almost everything in the world. Although he said the most interesting and entertaining things, Isabel perceived that he never said them to exhibit himself, and though he had a great good fortune, he was as far as possible from making a merit of it. He had enjoyed the best things of life, but they had not spoiled his sense of proportion. His composition was a mixture of good-humoured manly force and a modesty that at times was almost boyish; the sweet and wholesome savour of which—it was as agreeable as something tasted—lost nothing from the addition of a tone of kindness which was not boyish, inasmuch as there was a good deal of reflection and of conscience in it.

"I like your specimen English gentleman very much," Isabel said to Ralph, after Lord Warburton had gone.

"I like him too—I love him well," said Ralph. "But I pity him more."

Isabel looked at him askance.

"Why, that seems to me his only fault—that one can't pity him a little. He appears to have everything, to know everything, to be everything."

"Oh, he's in a bad way," Ralph insisted.

"I suppose you don't mean in health?"

"No, as to that, he's detestably robust. What I mean is that he is a man with a great position, who is playing all sorts of tricks with it. He doesn't take himself seriously."

"Does he regard himself as a joke?"

"Much worse; he regards himself as an imposition—as an abuse."

"Well, perhaps he is," said Isabel.

"Perhaps he is—though on the whole I don't think so. But in that case, what is more pitiable than a sentient, self-conscious abuse, planted by other hands, deeply rooted, but aching with a sense of its injustice? For me, I could take the poor fellow very seriously; he occupies a position that appeals to my imagination. Great responsibilities, great opportunities, great consideration, great wealth, great power, a natural share in the public affairs of a great country. But he is all in a muddle about himself, his position, his power, and everything else. He is the victim of a critical age; he has ceased to believe in himself, and he doesn't know what to believe in. When I attempt to tell him (because if I were he, I know very well what I should believe in), he calls me an old-fashioned and narrow-minded person. I believe he seriously thinks me an awful Philistine; he says I don't understand my time. I understand it certainly better than he, who can neither abolish himself as a nuisance nor maintain himself as an institution."

"He doesn't look very wretched," Isabel observed.

"Possibly not; though, being a man of imagination, I think he often has uncomfortable hours. But what is it to say of a man of his opportunities that he is not miserable? Besides, I believe he is."

"I don't," said Isabel.

"Well," her cousin rejoined, "if he is not, he ought to be!"

In the afternoon she spent an hour with her uncle on the lawn, where the old man sat, as usual, with his shawl over his legs and his large cup of diluted tea in his hands. In the course of conversation he asked her what she thought of their late visitor.

"I think he is charming," Isabel answered.

"He's a fine fellow," said Mr. Touchett, "but I don't recommend you to fall in love with him."

"I shall not do it then; I shall never fall in love but on your recommendation. Moreover," Isabel added, "my cousin gives me a rather sad account of Lord Warburton."

"Oh, indeed? I don't know what there may be to say, but you must remember that Ralph is rather fanciful."

"He thinks Lord Warburton is too radical—or not radical enough! I don't quite understand which," said Isabel.

The old man shook his head slowly, smiled, and put down his cup.

"I don't know which, either. He goes very far, but it is quite possible he doesn't go far enough. He seems to want to do away with a good many things, but he seems to want to remain himself. I suppose that is natural; but it is rather inconsistent."

"Oh, I hope he will remain himself," said Isabel. "If he were to be done away with, his friends would miss him sadly."

"Well," said the old man, "I guess he'll stay and amuse his friends. I should certainly miss him very much here at Gardencourt. He always amuses me when he comes over, and I think he amuses himself as well. There is a considerable number like him, round in society; they are very fashionable just now. I don't know what they are trying to do—whether they are trying to get up a revolution; I hope at any rate they will put it off till after I am gone. You see they want to disestablish everything; but I'm a pretty big landowner here, and I don't want to be disestablished. I wouldn't have come over if I had thought they were going to behave like that," Mr. Touchett went on, with expanding hilarity. "I came over because I thought England was a safe country. I call it a regular fraud, if they are going to introduce any considerable changes; there'll be a large number disappointed in that case."

"Oh, I do hope they will make a revolution!" Isabel exclaimed. "I should delight in seeing a revolution."

"Let me see," said her uncle, with a humorous intention; "I forget whether you are a liberal or a conservative. I have heard you take such opposite views."

"I am both. I think I am a little of everything. In a revolution—after it was well begun—I think I should be a

conservative. One sympathises more with them, and they have a chance to behave so picturesquely."

"I don't know that I understand what you mean by behaving picturesquely, but it seems to me that you do that always, my dear."

"Oh, you lovely man, if I could believe that!" the girl interrupted.

"I am afraid, after all, you won't have the pleasure of seeing a revolution here just now," Mr. Touchett went on. "If you want to see one, you must pay us a long visit. You see, when you come to the point, it wouldn't suit them to be taken at their word."

"Of whom are you speaking?"

"Well, I mean Lord Warburton and his friends — the radicals of the upper class. Of course I only know the way it strikes me. They talk about the changes, but I don't think they quite realise. You and I, you know, we know what it is to have lived under democratic institutions; I always thought them very comfortable, but I was used to them from the first. But then, I ain't a lord; you're a lady, my dear, but I ain't a lord. Now, over here, I don't think it quite comes home to them. It's a matter of every day and every hour, and I don't think many of them would find it as pleasant as what they've got. Of course if they want to try, it's their own business; but I expect they won't try very hard."

"Don't you think they are sincere?" Isabel asked.

"Well, they are very conscientious," Mr. Touchett allowed; "but it seems as if they took it out in theories, mostly. Their radical views are a kind of amusement; they have got to have some amusement, and they might have coarser tastes than that. You see they are very luxurious, and these progressive ideas are about their biggest luxury. They make them feel moral, and yet they don't affect their position. They think a great deal of their position; don't let one of them ever persuade you he doesn't, for if you were to proceed on that basis, you would be pulled up very short."

Isabel followed her uncle's argument, which he unfolded with his mild, reflective, optimistic accent, most attentively, and though she was unacquainted with the British aristocracy,

she found it in harmony with her general impressions of human nature. But she felt moved to put in a protest on Lord Warburton's behalf.

"I don't believe Lord Warburton's a humbug," she said; "I don't care what the others are. I should like to see Lord Warburton put to the test."

"Heaven deliver me from my friends!" Mr. Touchett answered. "Lord Warburton is a very amiable young man—a very fine young man. He has a hundred thousand a year. He owns fifty thousand acres of the soil of this little island. He has half-a-dozen houses to live in. He has a seat in Parliament as I have one at my own dinner-table. He has very cultivated tastes—cares for literature, for art, for science, for charming young ladies. The most cultivated is his taste for the new views. It affords him a great deal of entertainment—more perhaps than anything else, except the young ladies. His old house over there—what does he call it, Lockleigh?—is very attractive; but I don't think it is as pleasant as this. That doesn't matter, however—he has got so many others. His views don't hurt any one as far as I can see; they certainly don't hurt himself. And if there were to be a revolution, he would come off very easily; they wouldn't touch him, they would leave him as he is; he is too much liked."

"Ah, he couldn't be a martyr even if he wished!" Isabel exclaimed. "That's a very poor position."

"He will never be a martyr unless you make him one," said the old man.

Isabel shook her head; there might have been something laughable in the fact that she did it with a touch of sadness.

"I shall never make any one a martyr."

"You will never be one, I hope."

"I hope not. But you don't pity Lord Warburton, then, as Ralph does?"

Her uncle looked at her a while, with genial acuteness.

"Yes, I do, after all!"

CHAPTER IX

THE two Misses Molyneux, this nobleman's sisters, came presently to call upon her, and Isabel took a fancy to the young ladies, who appeared to her to have a very original stamp. It is true, that, when she spoke of them to her cousin as original, he declared that no epithet could be less applicable than this to the two Misses Molyneux, for that there were fifty thousand young women in England who exactly resembled them. Deprived of this advantage, however, Isabel's visitors retained that of an extreme sweetness and shyness of demeanour, and of having, as she thought, the kindest eyes in the world.

"They are not morbid, at any rate, whatever they are," our heroine said to herself; and she deemed this a great charm, for two or three of the friends of her girlhood had been regrettably open to the charge (they would have been so nice without it), to say nothing of Isabel's having occasionally suspected that it might become a fault of her own. The Misses Molyneux were not in their first youth, but they had bright, fresh complexions, and something of the smile of childhood. Their eyes, which Isabel admired so much, were quiet and contented, and their figures, of a generous roundness, were encased in sealskin jackets. Their friendliness was great, so great that they were almost embarrassed to show it; they seemed somewhat afraid of the young lady from the other side of the world, and rather looked than spoke their good wishes. But they made it clear to her that they hoped she would come to lunch at Lockleigh, where they lived with their brother, and then might see her very, very often. They wondered whether she wouldn't come over some day and sleep; they were expecting some people on the twenty-ninth, and perhaps she would come while the people were there.

"I'm afraid it isn't any one very remarkable," said the elder sister; "but I daresay you will take us as you find us."

"I shall find you delightful; I think you are enchanting just as you are," replied Isabel, who often praised profusely.

Her visitors blushed, and her cousin told her, after they were gone, that if she said such things to those poor girls, they would think she was quizzing them; he was sure it was the first time they had been called enchanting.

"I can't help it," Isabel answered. "I think it's lovely to be so quiet, and reasonable, and satisfied. I should like to be like that."

"Heaven forbid!" cried Ralph, with ardour.

"I mean to try and imitate them," said Isabel. "I want very much to see them at home."

She had this pleasure a few days later, when, with Ralph and his mother, she drove over to Lockleigh. She found the Misses Molyneux sitting in a vast drawing-room (she perceived afterwards it was one of several), in a wilderness of faded chintz; they were dressed on this occasion in black velveteen. Isabel liked them even better at home than she had done at Gardencourt, and was more than ever struck with the fact that they were not morbid. It had seemed to her before that, if they had a fault, it was a want of vivacity; but she presently saw that they were capable of deep emotion. Before lunch she was alone with them, for some time, on one side of the room, while Lord Warburton, at a distance, talked to Mrs. Touchett.

"Is it true that your brother is such a great radical?" Isabel asked. She knew it was true, but we have seen that her interest in human nature was keen, and she had a desire to draw the Misses Molyneux out.

"Oh dear, yes; he's immensely advanced," said Mildred, the younger sister.

"At the same time, Warburton is very reasonable," Miss Molyneux observed.

Isabel watched him a moment, at the other side of the room; he was evidently trying hard to make himself agreeable to Mrs. Touchett. Ralph was playing with one of the dogs before the fire, which the temperature of an English August, in the ancient, spacious room, had not made an impertinence. "Do you suppose your brother is sincere?" Isabel inquired with a smile.

"Oh, he must be, you know!" Mildred exclaimed, quickly; while the elder sister gazed at our heroine in silence.

"Do you think he would stand the test?"

"The test?"

"I mean, for instance, having to give up all this!"

"Having to give up Lockleigh?" said Miss Molyneux, finding her voice.

"Yes, and the other places; what are they called?"

The two sisters exchanged an almost frightened glance. "Do you mean—do you mean on account of the expense?" the younger one asked.

"I daresay he might let one or two of his houses," said the other.

"Let them for nothing?" Isabel inquired.

"I can't fancy his giving up his property," said Miss Molyneux.

"Ah, I am afraid he is an impostor!" Isabel exclaimed. "Don't you think it's a false position?"

Her companions, evidently, were rapidly getting bewildered. "My brother's position?" Miss Molyneux inquired.

"It's thought a very good position," said the younger sister. "It's the first position in the county."

"I suspect you think me very irreverent," Isabel took occasion to observe. "I suppose you revere your brother, and are rather afraid of him."

"Of course one looks up to one's brother," said Miss Molyneux, simply.

"If you do that, he must be very good—because you, evidently, are very good."

"He is most kind. It will never be known, the good he does."

"His ability is known," Mildred added; "every one thinks it's immense."

"Oh, I can see that," said Isabel. "But if I were he, I should wish to be a conservative. I should wish to keep everything."

"I think one ought to be liberal," Mildred argued, gently. "We have always been so, even from the earliest times."

"Ah well," said Isabel, "you have made a great success of it; I don't wonder you like it. I see you are very fond of crewels."

When Lord Warburton showed her the house, after lunch, it seemed to her a matter of course that it should be a noble picture. Within, it had been a good deal modernised—some of its best points had lost their purity; but as they saw it from the gardens, a stout, grey pile, of the softest, deepest, most weather-fretted hue, rising from a broad, still moat, it seemed to Isabel a castle in a fairy-tale. The day was cool and rather lustreless; the first note of autumn had been struck; and the watery sunshine rested on the walls in blurred and desultory gleams, washing them, as it were, in places tenderly chosen, where the ache of antiquity was keenest. Her host's brother, the Vicar, had come to lunch, and Isabel had had five minutes' talk with him—time enough to institute a search for theological characteristics and give it up as vain. The characteristics of the Vicar of Lockleigh were a big, athletic figure, a candid, natural countenance, a capacious appetite, and a tendency to abundant laughter. Isabel learned afterwards from her cousin that, before taking orders, he had been a mighty wrestler, and that he was still, on occasion—in the privacy of the family circle as it were—quite capable of flooring his man. Isabel liked him—she was in the mood for liking everything; but her imagination was a good deal taxed to think of him as a source of spiritual aid. The whole party, on leaving lunch, went to walk in the grounds; but Lord Warburton exercised some ingenuity in engaging his youngest visitor in a stroll somewhat apart from the others.

"I wish you to see the place properly, seriously," he said, "You can't do so if your attention is distracted by irrelevant gossip."

His own conversation (though he told Isabel a good deal about the house, which had a very curious history) was not purely archæological; he reverted at intervals to matters more personal—matters personal to the young lady as well as to himself. But at last, after a pause of some duration, returning for a moment to their ostensible theme, "Ah, well," he said, "I am very glad indeed you like the old house. I wish you could see more of it—that you could stay here a while. My sisters have taken an immense fancy to you—if that would be any inducement."

"There is no want of inducements," Isabel answered; "but I am afraid I can't make engagements. I am quite in my aunt's hands."

"Ah, excuse me if I say I don't exactly believe that. I am pretty sure you can do whatever you want."

"I am sorry if I make that impression on you; I don't think it's a nice impression to make."

"It has the merit of permitting me to hope." And Lord Warburton paused a moment.

"To hope what?"

"That in future I may see you often."

"Ah," said Isabel, "to enjoy that pleasure, I needn't be so terribly emancipated."

"Doubtless not; and yet, at the same time, I don't think your uncle likes me."

"You are very much mistaken. I have heard him speak very highly of you."

"I am glad you have talked about me," said Lord Warburton. "But, all the same, I don't think he would like me to keep coming to Gardencourt."

"I can't answer for my uncle's tastes," the girl rejoined, "though I ought, as far as possible, to take them into account. But, for myself, I shall be very glad to see you."

"Now that's what I like to hear you say. I am charmed when you say that."

"You are easily charmed, my lord," said Isabel.

"No, I am not easily charmed!" And then he stopped a moment. "But you have charmed me, Miss Archer," he added.

These words were uttered with an indefinable sound which startled the girl; it struck her as the prelude to something grave; she had heard the sound before, and she recognised it. She had no wish, however, that for the moment such a prelude should have a sequel, and she said, as gaily as possible and as quickly as an appreciable degree of agitation would allow her, "I am afraid there is no prospect of my being able to come here again."

"Never?" said Lord Warburton.

"I won't say 'never'; I should feel very melodramatic."

"May I come and see you then some day next week?"

"Most assuredly. What is there to prevent it?"

"Nothing tangible. But with you I never feel safe. I have a sort of sense that you are always judging people."

"You don't of necessity lose by that."

"It is very kind of you to say so; but even if I gain, stern justice is not what I most love. Is Mrs. Touchett going to take you abroad?"

"I hope so."

"Is England not good enough for you?"

"That's a very Machiavellian speech; it doesn't deserve an answer. I want very much to see foreign lands as well."

"Then you will go on judging, I suppose."

"Enjoying, I hope, too."

"Yes, that's what you enjoy most; I can't make out what you are up to," said Lord Warburton. "You strike me as having mysterious purposes—vast designs?"

"You are so good as to have a theory about me which I don't at all fill out. Is there anything mysterious in a purpose entertained and executed every year, in the most public manner, by fifty thousand of my fellow-countrymen—the purpose of improving one's mind by foreign travel?"

"You can't improve your mind, Miss Archer," her companion declared. "It's already a most formidable instrument. It looks down on us all; it despises us."

"Despises you? You are making fun of me," said Isabel, seriously.

"Well, you think us picturesque—that's the same thing, I won't be thought picturesque, to begin with; I am not so in the least. I protest."

"That protest is one of the most picturesque things I have ever heard," Isabel answered with a smile.

Lord Warburton was silent a moment. "You judge only from the outside—you don't care," he said presently. "You only care to amuse yourself!" The note she had heard in his voice a moment before reappeared, and mixed with it now was an audible strain of bitterness—a bitterness so abrupt and inconsequent that the girl was afraid she had hurt him. She had often heard that the English were a highly eccentric people; and she had even read in some ingenious author that they were, at bottom, the most romantic of races. Was Lord

Warburton suddenly turning romantic—was he going to make a scene, in his own house, only the third time they had met? She was reassured, quickly enough, by her sense of his great good manners, which was not impaired by the fact that he had already touched the furthest limit of good taste in expressing his admiration of a young lady who had confided in his hospitality. She was right in trusting to his good manners, for he presently went on, laughing a little, and without a trace of the accent that had discomposed her—"I don't mean, of course, that you amuse yourself with trifles. You select great materials; the foibles, the afflictions of human nature, the peculiarities of nations!"

"As regards that," said Isabel, "I should find in my own nation entertainment for a lifetime. But we have a long drive, and my aunt will soon wish to start." She turned back toward the others, and Lord Warburton walked beside her in silence. But before they reached the others—"I shall come and see you next week," he said.

She had received an appreciable shock, but as it died away she felt that she could not pretend to herself that it was altogether a painful one. Nevertheless, she made answer to this declaration, coldly enough, "Just as you please." And her coldness was not coquetry—a quality that she possessed in a much smaller degree than would have seemed probable to many critics; it came from a certain fear.

CHAPTER X

THE day after her visit to Lockleigh she received a note from her friend, Miss Stackpole—a note of which the envelope, exhibiting in conjunction the postmark of Liverpool and the neat calligraphy of the quick-fingered Henrietta, caused her some liveliness of emotion. "Here I am, my lovely friend," Miss Stackpole wrote; "I managed to get off at last. I decided only the night before I left New York—the *Interviewer* having come round to my figure. I put a few things into a bag, like a veteran journalist, and came down to the steamer in a street-car. Where are you, and where can we meet? I suppose you are visiting at some castle or other, and have already acquired the correct accent. Perhaps, even, you have married a lord; I almost hope you have, for I want some introductions to the first people, and shall count on you for a few. The *Interviewer* wants some light on the nobility. My first impressions (of the people at large) are not rose-coloured; but I wish to talk them over with you, and you know that whatever I am, at least I am not superficial. I have also something very particular to tell you. Do appoint a meeting as quickly as you can; come to London (I should like so much to visit the sights with you), or else let me come to you, *wherever you are*. I will do so with pleasure; for you know everything interests me, and I wish to see as much as possible of the inner life."

Isabel did not show this letter to her uncle; but she acquainted him with its purport, and, as she expected, he begged her instantly to assure Miss Stackpole, in his name, that he should be delighted to receive her at Gardencourt. "Though she is a literary lady," he said, "I suppose that, being an American, she won't reproduce me, as that other one did. She has seen others like me."

"She has seen no other so delightful!" Isabel answered; but she was not altogether at ease about Henrietta's reproductive instincts, which belonged to that side of her friend's

character which she regarded with least complacency. She wrote to Miss Stackpole, however, that she would be very welcome under Mr. Touchett's roof; and this enterprising young woman lost no time in signifying her intention of arriving. She had gone up to London, and it was from the metropolis that she took the train for the station nearest to Gardencourt, where Isabel and Ralph were in waiting to receive the visitor.

"Shall I love her, or shall I hate her?" asked Ralph, while they stood on the platform, before the advent of the train.

"Whichever you do will matter very little to her," said Isabel. "She doesn't care a straw what men think of her."

"As a man I am bound to dislike her, then. She must be a kind of monster. Is she very ugly?"

"No, she is decidedly pretty."

"A female interviewer—a reporter in petticoats? I am very curious to see her," Ralph declared.

"It is very easy to laugh at her, but it is not easy to be as brave as she."

"I should think not; interviewing requires bravery. Do you suppose she will interview me?"

"Never in the world. She will not think you of enough importance."

"You will see," said Ralph. "She will send a description of us all, including Bunchie, to her newspaper."

"I shall ask her not to," Isabel answered.

"You think she is capable of it, then."

"Perfectly."

"And yet you have made her your bosom-friend?"

"I have not made her my bosom-friend; but I like her, in spite of her faults."

"Ah, well," said Ralph, "I am afraid I shall dislike her, in spite of her merits."

"You will probably fall in love with her at the end of three days."

"And have my love-letters published in the *Interviewer?* Never!" cried the young man.

The train presently arrived, and Miss Stackpole, promptly descending, proved to be, as Isabel had said, decidedly pretty. She was a fair, plump person, of medium stature, with a

round face, a small mouth, a delicate complexion, a bunch of light brown ringlets at the back of her head, and a peculiarly open, surprised-looking eye. The most striking point in her appearance was the remarkable fixedness of this organ, which rested without impudence or defiance, but as if in conscientious exercise of a natural right, upon every object it happened to encounter. It rested in this manner upon Ralph himself, who was somewhat disconcerted by Miss Stackpole's gracious and comfortable aspect, which seemed to indicate that it would not be so easy as he had assumed to disapprove of her. She was very well dressed, in fresh dove-coloured draperies, and Ralph saw at a glance that she was scrupulously, fastidiously neat. From top to toe she carried not an ink-stain. She spoke in a clear, high voice—a voice not rich, but loud, though after she had taken her place, with her companions, in Mr. Touchett's carriage, she struck him, rather to his surprise, as not an abundant talker. She answered the inquiries made of her by Isabel, however, and in which the young man ventured to join, with a great deal of precision and distinctness; and later, in the library at Gardencourt, when she had made the acquaintance of Mr. Touchett (his wife not having thought it necessary to appear), did more to give the measure of her conversational powers.

"Well, I should like to know whether you consider yourselves American or English," she said. "If once I knew, I could talk to you accordingly."

"Talk to us anyhow, and we shall be thankful," Ralph answered, liberally.

She fixed her eyes upon him, and there was something in their character that reminded him of large polished buttons; he seemed to see the reflection of surrounding objects upon the pupil. The expression of a button is not usually deemed human, but there was something in Miss Stackpole's gaze that made him, as he was a very modest man, feel vaguely embarrassed and uncomfortable. This sensation, it must be added, after he had spent a day or two in her company, sensibly diminished, though it never wholly disappeared. "I don't suppose that you are going to undertake to persuade me that *you* are an American," she said.

"To please you, I will be an Englishman, I will be a Turk!"

"Well, if you can change about that way, you are very welcome," Miss Stackpole rejoined.

"I am sure you understand everything, and that differences of nationality are no barrier to you," Ralph went on.

Miss Stackpole gazed at him still. "Do you mean the foreign languages?"

"The languages are nothing. I mean the spirit — the genius."

"I am not sure that I understand you," said the correspondent of the *Interviewer;* "but I expect I shall before I leave."

"He is what is called a cosmopolitan," Isabel suggested.

"That means he's a little of everything and not much of any. I must say I think patriotism is like charity—it begins at home."

"Ah, but where does home begin, Miss Stackpole?" Ralph inquired.

"I don't know where it begins, but I know where it ends. It ended a long time before I got here."

"Don't you like it over here?" asked Mr. Touchett, with his mild, wise, aged, innocent voice.

"Well, sir, I haven't quite made up my mind what ground I shall take. I feel a good deal cramped. I felt it on the journey from Liverpool to London."

"Perhaps you were in a crowded carriage," Ralph suggested.

"Yes, but it was crowded with friends—a party of Americans whose acquaintance I had made upon the steamer; a most lovely group, from Little Rock, Arkansas. In spite of that I felt cramped—I felt something pressing upon me; I couldn't tell what it was. I felt at the very commencement as if I were not going to sympathise with the atmosphere. But I suppose I shall make my own atmosphere. Your surroundings seem very attractive."

"Ah, we too are a lovely group!" said Ralph. "Wait a little and you will see."

Miss Stackpole showed every disposition to wait, and evidently was prepared to make a considerable stay at Garden-

court. She occupied herself in the mornings with literary labour; but in spite of this Isabel spent many hours with her friend, who, once her daily task performed, was of an eminently social tendency. Isabel speedily found occasion to request her to desist from celebrating the charms of their common sojourn in print, having discovered, on the second morning of Miss Stackpole's visit, that she was engaged upon a letter to the *Interviewer*, of which the title, in her exquisitely neat and legible hand (exactly that of the copy-books which our heroine remembered at school), was "Americans and Tudors—Glimpses of Gardencourt." Miss Stackpole, with the best conscience in the world, offered to read her letter to Isabel, who immediately put in her protest.

"I don't think you ought to do that. I don't think you ought to describe the place."

Henrietta gazed at her, as usual. "Why, it's just what the people want, and it's a lovely place."

"It's too lovely to be put in the newspapers, and it's not what my uncle wants."

"Don't you believe that!" cried Henrietta. "They are always delighted, afterwards."

"My uncle won't be delighted—nor my cousin, either. They will consider it a breach of hospitality."

Miss Stackpole showed no sense of confusion; she simply wiped her pen, very neatly, upon an elegant little implement which she kept for the purpose, and put away her manuscript. "Of course if you don't approve, I won't do it; but I sacrifice a beautiful subject."

"There are plenty of other subjects, there are subjects all round you. We will take some drives, and I will show you some charming scenery."

"Scenery is not my department; I always need a human interest. You know I am deeply human, Isabel; I always was," Miss Stackpole rejoined. "I was going to bring in your cousin—the alienated American. There is a great demand just now for the alienated American, and your cousin is a beautiful specimen. I should have handled him severely."

"He would have died of it!" Isabel exclaimed. "Not of the severity, but of the publicity."

"Well, I should have liked to kill him a little. And I should have delighted to do your uncle, who seems to me a much nobler type—the American faithful still. He is a grand old man; I don't see how he can object to my paying him honour."

Isabel looked at her companion in much wonderment; it appeared to her so strange that a nature in which she found so much to esteem should exhibit such extraordinary disparities. "My poor Henrietta," she said, "you have no sense of privacy."

Henrietta coloured deeply, and for a moment her brilliant eyes were suffused; while Isabel marvelled more than ever at her inconsistency. "You do me great injustice," said Miss Stackpole, with dignity. "I have never written a word about myself!"

"I am very sure of that; but it seems to me one should be modest for others also!"

"Ah, that is very good!" cried Henrietta, seizing her pen again. "Just let me make a note of it, and I will put it in a letter." She was a thoroughly good-natured woman, and half an hour later she was in as cheerful a mood as should have been looked for in a newspaper-correspondent in want of material.

"I have promised to do the social side," she said to Isabel; "and how can I do it unless I get ideas? If I can't describe this place, don't you know some place I can describe?" Isabel promised she would bethink herself, and the next day, in conversation with her friend, she happened to mention her visit to Lord Warburton's ancient house. "Ah, you must take me there—that is just the place for me!" Miss Stackpole exclaimed. "I must get a glimpse of the nobility."

"I can't take you," said Isabel; "but Lord Warburton is coming here, and you will have a chance to see him and observe him. Only if you intend to repeat his conversation, I shall certainly give him warning."

"Don't do that," her companion begged; "I want him to be natural."

"An Englishman is never so natural as when he is holding his tongue," Isabel rejoined.

It was not apparent, at the end of three days, that his cousin had fallen in love with their visitor, though he had spent a good deal of time in her society. They strolled about the park together, and sat under the trees, and in the afternoon, when it was delightful to float along the Thames, Miss Stackpole occupied a place in the boat in which hitherto Ralph had had but a single companion. Her society had a less insoluble quality than Ralph had expected in the natural perturbation of his sense of the perfect adequacy of that of his cousin; for the correspondent of the *Interviewer* made him laugh a good deal, and he had long since decided that abundant laughter should be the embellishment of the remainder of his days. Henrietta, on her side, did not quite justify Isabel's declaration with regard to her indifference to masculine opinion; for poor Ralph appeared to have presented himself to her as an irritating problem, which it would be superficial on her part not to solve.

"What does he do for a living?" she asked of Isabel, the evening of her arrival. "Does he go round all day with his hands in his pockets?"

"He does nothing," said Isabel, smiling; "he's a gentleman of leisure."

"Well, I call that a shame—when I have to work like a cotton-mill," Miss Stackpole replied. "I should like to show him up."

"He is in wretched health; he is quite unfit for work," Isabel urged.

"Pshaw! don't you believe it. I work when I am sick," cried her friend. Later, when she stepped into the boat, on joining the water-party, she remarked to Ralph that she supposed he hated her—he would like to drown her.

"Ah, no," said Ralph, "I keep my victims for a slower torture. And you would be such an interesting one!"

"Well, you do torture me, I may say that. But I shock all your prejudices; that's one comfort."

"My prejudices? I haven't a prejudice to bless myself with. There's intellectual poverty for you."

"The more shame to you; I have some delicious prejudices. Of course I spoil your flirtation, or whatever it is you call it, with your cousin; but I don't care for that, for I render your

cousin the service of drawing you out. She will see how thin you are."

"Ah, do draw me out!" Ralph exclaimed. "So few people will take the trouble."

Miss Stackpole, in this undertaking, appeared to shrink from no trouble; resorting largely, whenever the opportunity offered, to the natural expedient of interrogation. On the following day the weather was bad, and in the afternoon the young man, by way of providing in-door amusement, offered to show her the pictures. Henrietta strolled through the long gallery in his society, while he pointed out its principal ornaments and mentioned the painters and subjects. Miss Stackpole looked at the pictures in perfect silence, committing herself to no opinion, and Ralph was gratified by the fact that she delivered herself of none of the little ready-made ejaculations of delight of which the visitors to Gardencourt were so frequently lavish. This young lady, indeed, to do her justice, was but little addicted to the use of conventional phrases; there was something earnest and inventive in her tone, which at times, in its brilliant deliberation, suggested a person of high culture speaking a foreign language. Ralph Touchett subsequently learned that she had at one time officiated as art-critic to a Transatlantic journal; but she appeared, in spite of this fact, to carry in her pocket none of the small change of admiration. Suddenly, just after he had called her attention to a charming Constable, she turned and looked at him as if he himself had been a picture.

"Do you always spend your time like this?" she demanded.

"I seldom spend it so agreeably," said Ralph.

"Well, you know what I mean—without any regular occupation."

"Ah," said Ralph, "I am the idlest man living."

Miss Stackpole turned her gaze to the Constable again, and Ralph bespoke her attention for a small Watteau hanging near it, which represented a gentleman in a pink doublet and hose and a ruff, leaning against the pedestal of the statue of a nymph in a garden, and playing the guitar to two ladies seated on the grass.

"That's my ideal of a regular occupation," he said.

Miss Stackpole turned to him again and though her eyes had rested upon the picture, he saw that she had not apprehended the subject. She was thinking of something much more serious.

"I don't see how you can reconcile it to your conscience," she said.

"My dear lady, I have no conscience!"

"Well, I advise you to cultivate one. You will need it the next time you go to America."

"I shall probably never go again."

"Are you ashamed to show yourself?"

Ralph meditated, with a gentle smile.

"I suppose that, if one has no conscience, one has no shame."

"Well, you have got plenty of assurance," Henrietta declared. "Do you consider it right to give up your country?"

"Ah, one doesn't give up one's country any more than one gives up one's grandmother. It's antecedent to choice."

"I suppose that means that you would give it up if you could? What do they think of you over here?"

"They delight in me."

"That's because you truckle to them."

"Ah, set it down a little to my natural charm!" Ralph urged.

"I don't know anything about your natural charm. If you have got any charm, it's quite unnatural. It's wholly acquired—or at least you have tried hard to acquire it, living over here. I don't say you have succeeded. It's a charm that I don't appreciate, any way. Make yourself useful in some way, and then we will talk about it."

"Well now, tell me what I shall do," said Ralph.

"Go right home, to begin with."

"Yes, I see. And then?"

"Take right hold of something."

"Well, now, what sort of thing?"

"Anything you please, so long as you take hold. Some new idea, some big work."

"Is it very difficult to take hold?" Ralph inquired.

"Not if you put your heart into it."

"Ah, my heart," said Ralph. "If it depends upon my heart——"

"Haven't you got any?"

"I had one a few days ago, but I have lost it since."

"You are not serious," Miss Stackpole remarked; "that's what's the matter with you." But for all this, in a day or two she again permitted him to fix her attention, and on this occasion assigned a different cause to her mysterious perversity. "I know what's the matter with you, Mr. Touchett," she said. "You think you are too good to get married."

"I thought so till I knew you, Miss Stackpole," Ralph answered; "and then I suddenly changed my mind."

"Oh, pshaw!" Henrietta exclaimed impatiently.

"Then it seemed to me," said Ralph, "that I was not good enough."

"It would improve you. Besides, it's your duty."

"Ah," cried the young man, "one has so many duties! Is that a duty too?"

"Of course it is—did you never know that before? It's every one's duty to get married."

Ralph meditated a moment; he was disappointed. There was something in Miss Stackpole he had begun to like; it seemed to him that if she was not a charming woman she was at least a very good fellow. She was wanting in distinction, but, as Isabel had said, she was brave, and there is always something fine about that. He had not supposed her to be capable of vulgar arts; but these last words struck him as a false note. When a marriageable young woman urges matrimony upon an unencumbered young man, the most obvious explanation of her conduct is not the altruistic impulse.

"Ah, well now, there is a good deal to be said about that," Ralph rejoined.

"There may be, but that is the principal thing. I must say I think it looks very exclusive, going round all alone, as if you thought no woman was good enough for you. Do you think you are better than any one else in the world? In America it's usual for people to marry."

"If it's my duty," Ralph asked, "is it not, by analogy, yours as well?"

Miss Stackpole's brilliant eyes expanded still further.

"Have you the fond hope of finding a flaw in my reasoning? Of course I have got as good a right to marry as any one else."

"Well then," said Ralph, "I won't say it vexes me to see you single. It delights me rather."

"You are not serious yet. You never will be."

"Shall you not believe me to be so on the day that I tell you I desire to give up the practice of going round alone?"

Miss Stackpole looked at him for a moment in a manner which seemed to announce a reply that might technically be called encouraging. But to his great surprise this expression suddenly resolved itself into an appearance of alarm, and even of resentment.

"No, not even then," she answered, dryly. After which she walked away.

"I have not fallen in love with your friend," Ralph said that evening to Isabel, "though we talked some time this morning about it."

"And you said something she didn't like," the girl replied.

Ralph stared. "Has she complained of me?"

"She told me she thinks there is something very low in the tone of Europeans towards women."

"Does she call me a European?"

"One of the worst. She told me you had said to her something that an American never would have said. But she didn't repeat it."

Ralph treated himself to a burst of resounding laughter.

"She is an extraordinary combination. Did she think I was making love to her?"

"No; I believe even Americans do that. But she apparently thought you mistook the intention of something she had said, and put an unkind construction on it."

"I thought she was proposing marriage to me, and I accepted her. Was that unkind?"

Isabel smiled. "It was unkind to me. I don't want you to marry."

"My dear cousin, what is one to do among you all?" Ralph demanded. "Miss Stackpole tells me it's my bounden duty, and that it's hers to see I do mine!"

"She has a great sense of duty," said Isabel gravely. "She has, indeed, and it's the motive of everything she says. That's what I like her for. She thinks it's very frivolous for you to be single; that's what she meant to express to you. If you thought she was trying to—to attract you, you were very wrong."

"It is true it was an odd way; but I did think she was trying to attract me. Excuse my superficiality."

"You are very conceited. She had no interested views, and never supposed you would think she had."

"One must be very modest, then, to talk with such women," Ralph said, humbly. "But it's a very strange type. She is too personal—considering that she expects other people not to be. She walks in without knocking at the door."

"Yes," Isabel admitted, "she doesn't sufficiently recognize the existence of knockers; and indeed I am not sure that she doesn't think them a rather pretentious ornament. She thinks one's door should stand ajar. But I persist in liking her."

"I persist in thinking her too familiar," Ralph rejoined, naturally somewhat uncomfortable under the sense of having been doubly deceived in Miss Stackpole.

"Well," said Isabel, smiling, "I am afraid it is because she is rather vulgar that I like her."

"She would be flattered by your reason!"

"If I should tell her, I would not express it in that way. I should say it is because there is something of the 'people' in her."

"What do you know about the people? and what does she, for that matter?"

"She knows a great deal, and I know enough to feel that she is a kind of emanation of the great democracy—of the continent, the country, the nation. I don't say that she sums it all up, that would be too much to ask of her. But she suggests it; she reminds me of it."

"You like her then for patriotic reasons. I am afraid it is on those very grounds that I object to her."

"Ah," said Isabel, with a kind of joyous sigh, "I like so many things! If a thing strikes me in a certain way, I like it. I don't want to boast, but I suppose I am rather versatile. I

like people to be totally different from Henrietta—in the style of Lord Warburton's sisters, for instance. So long as I look at the Misses Molyneux, they seem to me to answer a kind of ideal. Then Henrietta presents herself, and I am immensely struck with her; not so much for herself as what stands behind her."

"Ah, you mean the back view of her," Ralph suggested.

"What she says is true," his cousin answered; "you will never be serious. I like the great country stretching away beyond the rivers and across the prairies, blooming and smiling and spreading, till it stops at the blue Pacific! A strong, sweet, fresh odour seems to rise from it, and Henrietta—excuse my simile—has something of that odour in her garments."

Isabel blushed a little as she concluded this speech, and the blush, together with the momentary ardour she had thrown into it, was so becoming to her that Ralph stood smiling at her for a moment after she had ceased speaking.

"I am not sure the Pacific is blue," he said; "but you are a woman of imagination. Henrietta, however, is fragrant—Henrietta is decidedly fragrant!"

CHAPTER XI

HE took a resolve after this not to misinterpret her words, even when Miss Stackpole appeared to strike the personal note most strongly. He bethought himself that persons, in her view, were simple and homogeneous organisms, and that he, for his own part, was too perverted a representative of human nature to have a right to deal with her in strict reciprocity. He carried out his resolve with a great deal of tact, and the young lady found in her relations with him no obstacle to the exercise of that somewhat aggressive frankness which was the social expression of her nature. Her situation at Gardencourt, therefore, appreciated as we have seen her to be by Isabel, and full of appreciation herself of that fine freedom of composition which, to her sense, rendered Isabel's character a sister-spirit, and of the easy venerableness of Mr. Touchett, whose general tone, as she said, met with her full approval—her situation at Gardencourt would have been perfectly comfortable, had she not conceived an irresistible mistrust of the little lady to whom she had at first supposed herself obliged to pay a certain deference as mistress of the house. She presently discovered, however, that this obligation was of the lightest, and that Mrs. Touchett cared very little how Miss Stackpole behaved. Mrs. Touchett had spoken of her to Isabel as a "newspaper-woman," and expressed some surprise at her niece's having selected such a friend; but she had immediately added that she knew Isabel's friends were her own affair, and that she never undertook to like them all, or to restrict the girl to those she liked.

"If you could see none but the people I like, my dear, you would have a very small society," Mrs. Touchett frankly admitted; "and I don't think I like any man or woman well enough to recommend them to you. When it comes to recommending, it is a serious affair. I don't like Miss Stackpole—I don't like her tone. She talks too loud, and she looks at me

too hard. I am sure she has lived all her life in a boarding-house, and I detest the style of manners that such a way of living produces. If you ask me if I prefer my own manners, which you doubtless think very bad, I will tell you that I prefer them immensely. Miss Stackpole knows that I detest boarding-house civilisation, and she detests me for detesting it, because she thinks it is the highest in the world. She would like Gardencourt a great deal better if it were a boarding-house. For me, I find it almost too much of one! We shall never get on together, therefore, and there is no use of trying."

Mrs. Touchett was right in guessing that Henrietta disapproved of her, but she had not quite put her finger on the reason. A day or two after Miss Stackpole's arrival she had made some invidious reflections on American hotels, which excited a vein of counter-argument on the part of the correspondent of the *Interviewer*, who in the exercise of her profession had acquired a large familiarity with the technical hospitality of her country. Henrietta expressed the opinion that American hotels were the best in the world, and Mrs. Touchett recorded a conviction that they were the worst. Ralph, with his experimental geniality, suggested, by way of healing the breach, that the truth lay between the two extremes, and that the establishments in question ought to be described as fair middling. This contribution to the discussion, however, Miss Stackpole rejected with scorn. Middling, indeed! If they were not the best in the world, they were the worst, but there was nothing middling about an American hotel.

"We judge from different points of view, evidently," said Mrs. Touchett. "I like to be treated as an individual; you like to be treated as a 'party.'"

"I don't know what you mean," Henrietta replied. "I like to be treated as an American lady."

"Poor American ladies!" cried Mrs. Touchett, with a laugh. "They are the slaves of slaves."

"They are the companions of freemen," Henrietta rejoined.

"They are the companions of their servants—the Irish chambermaid and the negro waiter. They share their work."

"Do you call the domestics in an American household 'slaves'?" Miss Stackpole inquired. "If that's the way you desire to treat them, no wonder you don't like America."

"If you have not good servants, you are miserable," Mrs. Touchett said, serenely. "They are very bad in America, but I have five perfect ones in Florence."

"I don't see what you want with five," Henrietta could not help observing. "I don't think I should like to see five persons surrounding me in that menial position."

"I like them in that position better than in some others," cried Mrs. Touchett, with a laugh.

"Should you like me better if I were your butler, dear?" her husband asked.

"I don't think I should; you would make a very poor butler."

"The companions of freemen—I like that, Miss Stackpole," said Ralph. "It's a beautiful description."

"When I said freemen, I didn't mean you, sir!"

And this was the only reward that Ralph got for his compliment. Miss Stackpole was baffled; she evidently thought there was something treasonable in Mrs. Touchett's appreciation of a class which she privately suspected of being a mysterious survival of feudalism. It was perhaps because her mind was oppressed with this image that she suffered some days to elapse before she said to Isabel in the morning, while they were alone together,

"My dear friend, I wonder whether you are growing faithless?"

"Faithless? Faithless to you, Henrietta?"

"No, that would be a great pain; but it is not that."

"Faithless to my country, then?"

"Ah, that I hope will never be. When I wrote to you from Liverpool, I said I had something particular to tell you. You have never asked me what it is. Is it because you have suspected?"

"Suspected what? As a rule, I don't think I suspect," said Isabel. "I remember now that phrase in your letter, but I confess I had forgotten it. What have you to tell me?"

Henrietta looked disappointed, and her steady gaze betrayed it.

"You don't ask that right—as if you thought it important. You are changed—you are thinking of other things."

"Tell me what you mean, and I will think of that."

"Will you really think of it? That is what I wish to be sure of."

"I have not much control of my thoughts, but I will do my best," said Isabel.

Henrietta gazed at her, in silence, for a period of time which tried Isabel's patience, so that our heroine said at last—

"Do you mean that you are going to be married?"

"Not till I have seen Europe!" said Miss Stackpole. "What are you laughing at?" she went on. "What I mean is, that Mr. Goodwood came out in the steamer with me."

"Ah!" Isabel exclaimed, quickly.

"You say that right. I had a good deal of talk with him; he has come after you."

"Did he tell you so?"

"No, he told me nothing; that's how I knew it," said Henrietta, cleverly. "He said very little about you, but I spoke of you a good deal."

Isabel was silent a moment. At the mention of Mr. Goodwood's name she had coloured a little, and now her blush was slowly fading.

"I am very sorry you did that," she observed at last.

"It was a pleasure to me, and I liked the way he listened. I could have talked a long time to such a listener; he was so quiet, so intense; he drank it all in."

"What did you say about me?" Isabel asked.

"I said you were on the whole the finest creature I know."

"I am very sorry for that. He thinks too well of me already; he ought not to be encouraged."

"He is dying for a little encouragement. I see his face now, and his earnest, absorbed look, while I talked. I never saw an ugly man look so handsome!"

"He is very simple-minded," said Isabel. "And he is not so ugly."

"There is nothing so simple as a great passion."

"It is not a great passion; I am very sure it is not that."

"You don't say that as if you were sure."

Isabel gave rather a cold smile.

"I shall say it better to Mr. Goodwood himself!"

"He will soon give you a chance," said Henrietta.

Isabel offered no answer to this assertion, which her companion made with an air of great confidence.

"He will find you changed," the latter pursued. "You have been affected by your new surroundings."

"Very likely. I am affected by everything."

"By everything but Mr. Goodwood!" Miss Stackpole exclaimed, with a laugh.

Isabel failed even to smile in reply; and in a moment she said—

"Did he ask you to speak to me?"

"Not in so many words. But his eyes asked it—and his handshake, when he bade me good-bye."

"Thank you for doing so." And Isabel turned away.

"Yes, you are changed; you have got new ideas over here," her friend continued.

"I hope so," said Isabel; "one should get as many new ideas as possible."

"Yes; but they shouldn't interfere with the old ones."

Isabel turned about again. "If you mean that I had any idea with regard to Mr. Goodwood——" And then she paused; Henrietta's bright eyes seemed to her to grow enormous.

"My dear child, you certainly encouraged him," said Miss Stackpole.

Isabel appeared for the moment to be on the point of denying this charge, but instead of this she presently answered—"It is very true; I did encourage him." And then she inquired whether her companion had learned from Mr. Goodwood what he intended to do. This inquiry was a concession to curiosity, for she did not enjoy discussing the gentleman with Henrietta Stackpole, and she thought that in her treatment of the subject this faithful friend lacked delicacy.

"I asked him, and he said he meant to do nothing," Miss Stackpole answered. "But I don't believe that; he's not a man to do nothing. He is a man of action. Whatever

happens to him, he will always do something, and whatever he does will be right."

"I quite believe that," said Isabel. Henrietta might be wanting in delicacy; but it touched the girl, all the same, to hear this rich assertion made.

"Ah, you *do* care for him," Henrietta murmured.

"Whatever he does will be right," Isabel repeated. "When a man is of that supernatural mould, what does it matter to him whether one cares for him?"

"It may not matter to him, but it matters to one's self."

"Ah, what it matters to me, that is not what we are discussing," said Isabel, smiling a little.

This time her companion was grave. "Well, I don't care; you have changed," she replied. "You are not the girl you were a few short weeks ago, and Mr. Goodwood will see it. I expect him here any day."

"I hope he will hate me, then," said Isabel.

"I believe that you hope it about as much as I believe that he is capable of it."

To this observation our heroine made no rejoinder; she was absorbed in the feeling of alarm given her by Henrietta's intimation that Caspar Goodwood would present himself at Gardencourt. Alarm is perhaps a violent term to apply to the uneasiness with which she regarded this contingency; but her uneasiness was keen, and there were various good reasons for it. She pretended to herself that she thought the event impossible, and, later, she communicated her disbelief to her friend; but for the next forty-eight hours, nevertheless, she stood prepared to hear the young man's name announced. The feeling was oppressive; it made the air sultry, as if there were to be a change of weather; and the weather, socially speaking, had been so agreeable during Isabel's stay at Gardencourt that any change would be for the worse. Her suspense, however, was dissipated on the second day. She had walked into the park, in company with the sociable Bunchie, and after strolling about for some time, in a manner at once listless and restless, had seated herself on a garden-bench, within sight of the house, beneath a spreading beech, where, in a white dress ornamented with black ribbons, she formed, among the flicker-

ing shadows, a very graceful and harmonious image. She entertained herself for some moments with talking to the little terrier, as to whom the proposal of an ownership divided with her cousin had been applied as impartially as possible—as impartially as Bunchie's own somewhat fickle and inconstant sympathies would allow. But she was notified for the first time, on this occasion, of the finite character of Bunchie's intellect; hitherto she had been mainly struck with its extent. It seemed to her at last that she would do well to take a book; formerly, when she felt heavy-hearted, she had been able, with the help of some well-chosen volume, to transfer the seat of consciousness to the organ of pure reason. Of late, however, it was not to be denied, literature had seemed a fading light, and even after she had reminded herself that her uncle's library was provided with a complete set of those authors which no gentleman's collection should be without, she sat motionless and empty-handed, with her eyes fixed upon the cool green turf of the lawn. Her meditations were presently interrupted by the arrival of a servant, who handed her a letter. The letter bore the London postmark, and was addressed in a hand that she knew—that she seemed to know all the better, indeed, as the writer had been present to her mind when the letter was delivered. This document proved to be short, and I may give it entire.

"My dear Miss Archer—I don't know whether you will have heard of my coming to England, but even if you have not, it will scarcely be a surprise to you. You will remember that when you gave me my dismissal at Albany three months ago, I did not accept it. I protested against it. You in fact appeared to accept my protest, and to admit that I had the right on my side. I had come to see you with the hope that you would let me bring you over to my conviction; my reasons for entertaining this hope had been of the best. But you disappointed it; I found you changed, and you were able to give me no reason for the change. You admitted that you were unreasonable, and it was the only concession you would make; but it was a very cheap one, because you are not unreasonable. No, you are not, and you never will be. Therefore it is that I believe you will let me see you again. You told me that I am not disagreeable to you, and I believe it; for I don't see why that should be. I shall always think of you; I shall never think of any one else. I came to England simply because you are here; I couldn't stay at home after you had gone; I hated the country because you were not in it. If I like this

country at present, it is only because you are here. I have been to England before, but I have never enjoyed it much. May I not come and see you for half-an-hour? This at present is the dearest wish of, yours faithfully,

"Caspar Goodwood."

Isabel read Mr. Goodwood's letter with such profound attention that she had not perceived an approaching tread on the soft grass. Looking up, however, as she mechanically folded the paper, she saw Lord Warburton standing before her.

CHAPTER XII

SHE put the letter into her pocket, and offered her visitor a smile of welcome, exhibiting no trace of discomposure, and half surprised at her self-possession.

"They told me you were out here," said Lord Warburton; "and as there was no one in the drawing-room, and it is really you that I wish to see, I came out with no more ado."

Isabel had got up; she felt a wish, for the moment, that he should not sit down beside her. "I was just going indoors," she said.

"Please don't do that; it is much pleasanter here; I have ridden over from Lockleigh; it's a lovely day." His smile was peculiarly friendly and pleasing, and his whole person seemed to emit that radiance of good-feeling and good fare which had formed the charm of the girl's first impression of him. It surrounded him like a zone of fine June weather.

"We will walk about a little, then," said Isabel, who could not divest herself of the sense of an intention on the part of her visitor, and who wished both to elude the intention and to satisfy her curiosity regarding it. It had flashed upon her vision once before, and it had given her on that occasion, as we know, a certain alarm. This alarm was composed of several elements, not all of which were disagreeable; she had indeed spent some days in analysing them, and had succeeded in separating the pleasant part of this idea of Lord Warburton's making love to her from the painful. It may appear to some readers that the young lady was both precipitate and unduly fastidious; but the latter of these facts, if the charge be true, may serve to exonerate her from the discredit of the former. She was not eager to convince herself that a territorial magnate, as she had heard Lord Warburton called, was smitten with her charms; because a declaration from such a source would point to more questions than it would answer. She had received a strong impression of Lord Warburton's being a personage, and she

had occupied herself in examining the idea. At the risk of making the reader smile, it must be said that there had been moments when the intimation that she was admired by a "personage" struck her as an aggression which she would rather have been spared. She had never known a personage before; there were no personages in her native land. When she had thought of such matters as this, she had done so on the basis of character—of what one likes in a gentleman's mind and in his talk. She herself was a character—she could not help being aware of that; and hitherto her visions of a completed life had concerned themselves largely with moral images—things as to which the question would be whether they pleased her soul. Lord Warburton loomed up before her, largely and brightly, as a collection of attributes and powers which were not to be measured by this simple rule, but which demanded a different sort of appreciation—an appreciation which the girl, with her habit of judging quickly and freely, felt that she lacked the patience to bestow. Of course, there would be a short cut to it, and as Lord Warburton was evidently a very fine fellow, it would probably also be a safe cut. Isabel was able to say all this to herself, but she was unable to feel the force of it. What she felt was that a territorial, a political, a social magnate had conceived the design of drawing her into the system in which he lived and moved. A certain instinct, not imperious, but persuasive, told her to resist—it murmured to her that virtually she had a system and an orbit of her own. It told her other things besides—things which both contradicted and confirmed each other; that a girl might do much worse than trust herself to such a man as Lord Warburton, and that it would be very interesting to see something of his system from his own point of view; that, on the other hand, however, there was evidently a great deal of it which she should regard only as an incumbrance, and that even in the whole there was something heavy and rigid which would make it unacceptable. Furthermore, there was a young man lately come from America who had no system at all; but who had a character of which it was useless for her to try to persuade herself that the impression on her mind had been light. The letter that she carried in her pocket sufficiently reminded her of the

contrary. Smile not, however, I venture to repeat, at this simple young lady from Albany, who debated whether she should accept an English peer before he had offered himself, and who was disposed to believe that on the whole she could do better. She was a person of great good faith, and if there was a great deal of folly in her wisdom, those who judge her severely may have the satisfaction of finding that, later, she became consistently wise only at the cost of an amount of folly which will constitute almost a direct appeal to charity.

Lord Warburton seemed quite ready to walk, to sit, or to do anything that Isabel should propose, and he gave her this assurance with his usual air of being particularly pleased to exercise a social virtue. But he was, nevertheless, not in command of his emotions, and as he strolled beside her for a moment, in silence, looking at her without letting her know it, there was something embarrassed in his glance and his misdirected laughter. Yes, assuredly—as we have touched on the point, we may return to it for a moment again—the English are the most romantic people in the world, and Lord Warburton was about to give an example of it. He was about to take a step which would astonish all his friends and displease a great many of them, and which, superficially, had nothing to recommend it. The young lady who trod the turf beside him had come from a queer country across the sea, which he knew a good deal about; her antecedents, her associations, were very vague to his mind, except in so far as they were generic, and in this sense they revealed themselves with a certain vividness. Miss Archer had neither a fortune nor the sort of beauty that justifies a man to the multitude, and he calculated that he had spent about twenty-six hours in her company. He had summed up all this—the perversity of the impulse, which had declined to avail itself of the most liberal opportunities to subside, and the judgment of mankind, as exemplified particularly in the more quickly-judging half of it; he had looked these things well in the face, and then he had dismissed them from his thoughts. He cared no more for them than for the rosebud in his button-hole. It is the good fortune of a man who for the greater part of a lifetime has abstained without effort from making himself disagreeable to his friends, that when the

need comes for such a course it is not discredited by irritating associations.

"I hope you had a pleasant ride," said Isabel, who observed her companion's hesitancy.

"It would have been pleasant if for nothing else than that it brought me here," Lord Warburton answered.

"Are you so fond of Gardencourt?" the girl asked; more and more sure that he meant to make some demand of her; wishing not to challenge him if he hesitated, and yet to keep all the quietness of her reason if he proceeded. It suddenly came upon her that her situation was one which a few weeks ago she would have deemed deeply romantic; the park of an old English country-house, with the foreground embellished by a local nobleman in the act of making love to a young lady who, on careful inspection, should be found to present remarkable analogies with herself. But if she were now the heroine of the situation, she succeeded scarcely the less in looking at it from the outside.

"I care nothing for Gardencourt," said Lord Warburton; "I care only for you."

"You have known me too short a time to have a right to say that, and I cannot believe you are serious."

These words of Isabel's were not perfectly sincere, for she had no doubt whatever that he was serious. They were simply a tribute to the fact, of which she was perfectly aware, that those he himself had just uttered would have excited surprise on the part of the public at large. And, moreover, if anything beside the sense she had already acquired that Lord Warburton was not a frivolous person had been needed to convince her, the tone in which he replied to her would quite have served the purpose.

"One's right in such a matter is not measured by the time, Miss Archer; it is measured by the feeling itself. If I were to wait three months, it would make no difference; I shall not be more sure of what I mean than I am to-day. Of course I have seen you very little; but my impression dates from the very first hour we met. I lost no time; I fell in love with you then. It was at first sight, as the novels say; I know now that is not a fancy-phrase, and I shall think better of novels for evermore. Those two days I spent here settled

it; I don't know whether you suspected I was doing so, but I paid—mentally speaking, I mean—the greatest possible attention to you. Nothing you said, nothing you did, was lost upon me. When you came to Gardencourt the other day—or rather, when you went away—I was perfectly sure. Nevertheless, I made up my mind to think it over, and to question myself narrowly. I have done so; all these days I have thought of nothing else. I don't make mistakes about such things; I am a very judicious fellow. I don't go off easily, but when I am touched, it's for life. It's for life, Miss Archer, it's for life," Lord Warburton repeated in the kindest, tenderest, pleasantest voice Isabel had ever heard, and looking at her with eyes that shone with the light of a passion that had sifted itself clear of the baser parts of emotion—the heat, the violence, the unreason—and which burned as steadily as a lamp in a windless place.

By tacit consent, as he talked, they had walked more and more slowly, and at last they stopped, and he took her hand.

"Ah, Lord Warburton, how little you know me!" Isabel said, very gently; gently, too, she drew her hand away.

"Don't taunt me with that; that I don't know you better makes me unhappy enough already; it's all my loss. But that is what I want, and it seems to me I am taking the best way. If you will be my wife, then I shall know you, and when I tell you all the good I think of you, you will not be able to say it is from ignorance."

"If you know me little, I know you even less," said Isabel.

"You mean that, unlike yourself, I may not improve on acquaintance? Ah, of course, that is very possible. But think, to speak to you as I do, how determined I must be to try and give satisfaction! You do like me rather, don't you?"

"I like you very much, Lord Warburton," the girl answered; and at this moment she liked him immensely.

"I thank you for saying that; it shows you don't regard me as a stranger. I really believe I have filled all the other relations of life very creditably, and I don't see why I should not fill this one—in which I offer myself to you—seeing that I care so much more about it. Ask the people who know me well; I have friends who will speak for me."

"I don't need the recommendation of your friends," said Isabel.

"Ah now, that is delightful of you. You believe in me yourself."

"Completely," Isabel declared; and it was the truth.

The light in her companion's eyes turned into a smile, and he gave a long exhalation of joy.

"If you are mistaken, Miss Archer, let me lose all I possess!"

She wondered whether he meant this for a reminder that he was rich, and, on the instant, felt sure that he did not. He was thinking that, as he would have said himself; and indeed he might safely leave it to the memory of any interlocutor, especially of one to whom he was offering his hand. Isabel had prayed that she might not be agitated, and her mind was tranquil enough, even while she listened and asked herself what it was best she should say, to indulge in this incidental criticism. What she should say, had she asked herself? Her foremost wish was to say something as nearly as possible as kind as what he had said to her. His words had carried perfect conviction with them; she felt that he loved her.

"I thank you more than I can say for your offer," she rejoined at last; "it does me great honour."

"Ah, don't say that!" Lord Warburton broke out. "I was afraid you would say something like that. I don't see what you have to do with that sort of thing. I don't see why you should thank me—it is I who ought to thank you, for listening to me; a man whom you know so little, coming down on you with such a thumper! Of course it's a great question; I must tell you that I would rather ask it than have it to answer myself. But the way you have listened—or at least your having listened at all—gives me some hope."

"Don't hope too much," Isabel said.

"Oh, Miss Archer!" her companion murmured, smiling again in his seriousness, as if such a warning might perhaps be taken but as the play of high spirits—the coquetry of elation.

"Should you be greatly surprised if I were to beg you not to hope at all?" Isabel asked.

"Surprised? I don't know what you mean by surprise. It wouldn't be that; it would be a feeling very much worse."

Isabel walked on again; she was silent for some minutes.

"I am very sure that, highly as I already think of you, my opinion of you, if I should know you well, would only rise. But I am by no means sure that you would not be disappointed. And I say that not in the least out of conventional modesty; it is perfectly sincere."

"I am willing to risk it, Miss Archer," her companion answered.

"It's a great question, as you say; it's a very difficult question."

"I don't expect you, of course, to answer it outright. Think it over as long as may be necessary. If I can gain by waiting, I will gladly wait a long time. Only remember that in the end my dearest happiness depends upon your answer."

"I should be very sorry to keep you in suspense," said Isabel.

"Oh, don't mind. I would much rather have a good answer six months hence than a bad one to-day."

"But it is very probable that even six months hence I should not be able to give you one that you would think good."

"Why not, since you really like me?"

"Ah, you must never doubt of that," said Isabel.

"Well, then, I don't see what more you ask."

"It is not what I ask; it is what I can give. I don't think I should suit you; I really don't think I should."

"You needn't bother about that; that's my affair. You needn't be a better royalist than the king."

"It's not only that," said Isabel; "but I am not sure I wish to marry any one."

"Very likely you don't. I have no doubt a great many women begin that way," said his lordship, who, be it averred, did not in the least believe in the axiom he thus beguiled his anxiety by uttering. "But they are frequently persuaded."

"Ah, that is because they want to be!"

And Isabel lightly laughed.

Her suitor's countenance fell, and he looked at her for a while in silence.

"I'm afraid it's my being an Englishman that makes you hesitate," he said, presently. "I know your uncle thinks you ought to marry in your own country."

Isabel listened to this assertion with some interest; it had never occurred to her that Mr. Touchett was likely to discuss her matrimonial prospects with Lord Warburton.

"Has he told you that?" she asked.

"I remember his making the remark; he spoke perhaps of Americans generally."

"He appears himself to have found it very pleasant to live in England," said Isabel, in a manner that might have seemed a little perverse, but which expressed both her constant perception of her uncle's pictorial circumstances and her general disposition to elude any obligation to take a restricted view.

It gave her companion hope, and he immediately exclaimed warmly—

"Ah, my dear Miss Archer, old England is a very good sort of country, you know! And it will be still better when we have furbished it up a little."

"Oh, don't furbish it, Lord Warburton; leave it alone; I like it this way."

"Well, then, if you like it, I am more and more unable to see your objection to what I propose."

"I am afraid I can't make you understand."

"You ought at least to try; I have got a fair intelligence. Are you afraid—afraid of the climate? We can easily live elsewhere, you know. You can pick out your climate, the whole world over."

These words were uttered with a tender eagerness which went to Isabel's heart, and she would have given her little finger at that moment, to feel, strongly and simply, the impulse to answer, "Lord Warburton, it is impossible for a woman to do better in this world than to commit herself to your loyalty."

But though she could conceive the impulse, she could not let it operate; her imagination was charmed, but it was not led captive. What she finally bethought herself of saying was something very different—something which altogether deferred the need of answering.

"Don't think me unkind if I ask you to say no more about this to-day."

"Certainly, certainly!" cried Lord Warburton. "I wouldn't bore you for the world."

"You have given me a great deal to think about, and I promise you I will do it justice."

"That's all I ask of you, of course—and that you will remember that my happiness is in your hands."

Isabel listened with extreme respect to this admonition, but she said after a minute—"I must tell you that what I shall think about is some way of letting you know that what you ask is impossible, without making you miserable."

"There is no way to do that, Miss Archer. I won't say that, if you refuse me, you will kill me; I shall not die of it. But I shall do worse; I shall live to no purpose."

"You will live to marry a better woman than I."

"Don't say that, please," said Lord Warburton, very gravely. "That is fair to neither of us."

"To marry a worse one, then."

"If there are better women than you, then I prefer the bad ones; that's all I can say," he went on, with the same gravity. "There is no accounting for tastes."

His gravity made her feel equally grave, and she showed it by again requesting him to drop the subject for the present. "I will speak to you myself, very soon," she said. "Perhaps I shall write to you."

"At your convenience, yes," he answered. "Whatever time you take, it must seem to me long, and I suppose I must make the best of that."

"I shall not keep you in suspense; I only want to collect my mind a little."

He gave a melancholy sigh and stood looking at her a moment, with his hands behind him, giving short nervous shakes to his hunting-whip. "Do you know I am very much afraid of it—of that mind of yours?"

Our heroine's biographer can scarcely tell why, but the question made her start and brought a conscious blush to her cheek. She returned his look a moment, and then, with a note in her voice that might almost have appealed to his compassion—"So am I, my lord!" she exclaimed.

His compassion was not stirred, however; all that he possessed of the faculty of pity was needed at home. "Ah! be merciful, be merciful," he murmured.

"I think you had better go," said Isabel. "I will write to you."

"Very good; but whatever you write, I will come and see you." And then he stood reflecting, with his eyes fixed on the observant countenance of Bunchie, who had the air of having understood all that had been said, and of pretending to carry off the indiscretion by a simulated fit of curiosity as to the roots of an ancient beech. "There is one thing more," said Lord Warburton. "You know, if you don't like Lockleigh—if you think it's damp, or anything of that sort—you need never go within fifty miles of it. It is not damp, by the way; I have had the house thoroughly examined; it is perfectly sanitary. But if you shouldn't fancy it, you needn't dream of living in it. There is no difficulty whatever about that; there are plenty of houses. I thought I would just mention it; some people don't like a moat, you know. Good-bye."

"I delight in a moat," said Isabel. "Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and she gave him hers a moment—a moment long enough for him to bend his head and kiss it. Then, shaking his hunting-whip with little quick strokes, he walked rapidly away. He was evidently very nervous.

Isabel herself was nervous, but she was not affected as she would have imagined. What she felt was not a great responsibility, a great difficulty of choice; for it appeared to her that there was no choice in the question. She could not marry Lord Warburton; the idea failed to correspond to any vision of happiness that she had hitherto entertained, or was now capable of entertaining. She must write this to him, she must convince him, and this duty was comparatively simple. But what disturbed her, in the sense that it struck her with wonderment, was this very fact that it cost her so little to refuse a great opportunity. With whatever qualifications one would, Lord Warburton had offered her a great opportunity; the situation might have discomforts, might contain elements that would displease her, but she did her sex no injustice in believing that nineteen women out of

twenty would accommodate themselves to it with extreme zeal. Why then upon her also should it not impose itself? Who was she, what was she, that she should hold herself superior? What view of life, what design upon fate, what conception of happiness, had she that pretended to be larger than this large occasion? If she would not do this, then she must do great things, she must do something greater. Poor Isabel found occasion to remind herself from time to time that she must not be too proud, and nothing could be more sincere than her prayer to be delivered from such a danger; for the isolation and loneliness of pride had for her mind the horror of a desert place. If it were pride that interfered with her accepting Lord Warburton, it was singularly misplaced; and she was so conscious of liking him that she ventured to assure herself it was not. She liked him too much to marry him, that was the point; something told her that she should not be satisfied, and to inflict upon a man who offered so much a wife with a tendency to criticise would be a peculiarly discreditable act. She had promised him that she would consider his proposal, and when, after he had left her, she wandered back to the bench where he had found her, and lost herself in meditation, it might have seemed that she was keeping her word. But this was not the case; she was wondering whether she were not a cold, hard girl; and when at last she got up and rather quickly went back to the house, it was because, as she had said to Lord Warburton, she was really frightened at herself.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was this feeling, and not the wish to ask advice—she had no desire whatever for that—that led her to speak to her uncle of what Lord Warburton had said to her. She wished to speak to some one; she should feel more natural, more human, and her uncle, for this purpose, presented himself in a more attractive light than either her aunt or her friend Henrietta. Her cousin, of course, was a possible confidant; but it would have been disagreeable to her to confide this particular matter to Ralph. So, the next day, after breakfast, she sought her occasion. Her uncle never left his apartment till the afternoon; but he received his cronies, as he said, in his dressing-room. Isabel had quite taken her place in the class so designated, which, for the rest, included the old man's son, his physician, his personal servant, and even Miss Stackpole. Mrs. Touchett did not figure in the list, and this was an obstacle the less to Isabel's finding her uncle alone. He sat in a complicated mechanical chair, at the open window of his room, looking westward over the park and the river, with his newspapers and letters piled up beside him, his toilet freshly and minutely made, and his smooth, speculative face composed to benevolent expectation.

Isabel approached her point very directly. "I think I ought to let you know that Lord Warburton has asked me to marry him. I suppose I ought to tell my aunt; but it seems best to tell you first."

The old man expressed no surprise, but thanked her for the confidence she showed him. "Do you mind telling me whether you accepted him?" he added.

"I have not answered him definitely yet; I have taken a little time to think of it, because that seems more respectful. But I shall not accept him."

Mr. Touchett made no comment upon this; he had the air of thinking that whatever interest he might take in the matter from the point of view of sociability, he had no active

voice in it. "Well, I told you you would be a success over here. Americans are highly appreciated."

"Very highly indeed," said Isabel. "But at the cost of seeming ungrateful, I don't think I can marry Lord Warburton."

"Well," her uncle went on, "of course an old man can't judge for a young lady. I am glad you didn't ask me before you made up your mind. I suppose I ought to tell you," he added slowly, but as if it were not of much consequence, "that I have known all about it these three days."

"About Lord Warburton's state of mind?"

"About his intentions, as they say here. He wrote me a very pleasant letter, telling me all about them. Should you like to see it?" the old man asked, obligingly.

"Thank you; I don't think I care about that. But I am glad he wrote to you; it was right that he should, and he would be certain to do what was right."

"Ah, well, I guess you do like him!" Mr. Touchett declared. "You needn't pretend you don't."

"I like him extremely; I am very free to admit that. But I don't wish to marry any one just now."

"You think some one may come along whom you may like better. Well, that's very likely," said Mr. Touchett, who appeared to wish to show his kindness to the girl by easing off her decision, as it were, and finding cheerful reasons for it.

"I don't care if I don't meet any one else; I like Lord Warburton quite well enough," said Isabel, with that appearance of a sudden change of point of view with which she sometimes startled and even displeased her interlocutors.

Her uncle, however, seemed proof against either of these sensations.

"He's a very fine man," he resumed, in a tone which might have passed for that of encouragement. "His letter was one of the pleasantest letters I have received for some weeks. I suppose one of the reasons I liked it was that it was all about you; that is, all except the part which was about himself. I suppose he told you all that."

"He would have told me everything I wished to ask him," Isabel said.

"But you didn't feel curious?"

"My curiosity would have been idle—once I had determined to decline his offer."

"You didn't find it sufficiently attractive?" Mr. Touchett inquired.

The girl was silent a moment.

"I suppose it was that," she presently admitted. "But I don't know why."

"Fortunately, ladies are not obliged to give reasons," said her uncle. "There's a great deal that's attractive about such an idea; but I don't see why the English should want to entice us away from our native land. I know that we try to attract them over there; but that's because our population is insufficient. Here, you know, they are rather crowded. However, I suppose there is room for charming young ladies everywhere."

"There seems to have been room here for you," said Isabel, whose eyes had been wandering over the large pleasure-spaces of the park.

Mr. Touchett gave a shrewd, conscious smile.

"There is room everywhere, my dear, if you will pay for it. I sometimes think I have paid too much for this. Perhaps you also might have to pay too much."

"Perhaps I might," the girl replied.

This suggestion gave her something more definite to rest upon than she had found in her own thoughts, and the fact of her uncle's genial shrewdness being associated with her dilemma seemed to prove to her that she was concerned with the natural and reasonable emotions of life, and not altogether a victim to intellectual eagerness and vague ambitions —ambitions reaching beyond Lord Warburton's handsome offer to something indefinable and possibly not commendable. In so far as the indefinable had an influence upon Isabel's behaviour at this juncture, it was not the conception, however unformulated, of a union with Caspar Goodwood; for however little she might have felt warranted in lending a receptive ear to her English suitor, she was at least as far removed from the disposition to let the young man from Boston take complete possession of her. The sentiment in which she ultimately took refuge, after reading his letter, was a critical

view of his having come abroad; for it was part of the influence he had upon her that he seemed to take from her the sense of freedom. There was something too forcible, something oppressive and restrictive, in the manner in which he presented himself. She had been haunted at moments by the image of his disapproval, and she had wondered—a consideration she had never paid in one equal degree to any one else—whether he would like what she did. The difficulty was that more than any man she had ever known, more than poor Lord Warburton (she had begun now to give his lordship the benefit of this epithet), Caspar Goodwood gave her an impression of energy. She might like it or not, but at any rate there was something very strong about him; even in one's usual contact with him one had to reckon with it. The idea of a diminished liberty was particularly disagreeable to Isabel at present, because it seemed to her that she had just given a sort of personal accent to her independence by making up her mind to refuse Lord Warburton. Sometimes Caspar Goodwood had seemed to range himself on the side of her destiny, to be the stubbornest fact she knew; she said to herself at such moments that she might evade him for a time, but that she must make terms with him at last—terms which would be certain to be favourable to himself.

Her impulse had been to avail herself of the things that helped her to resist such an obligation; and this impulse had been much concerned in her eager acceptance of her aunt's invitation, which had come to her at a time when she expected from day to day to see Mr. Goodwood, and when she was glad to have an answer ready for something she was sure he would say to her. When she had told him at Albany, on the evening of Mrs. Touchett's visit, that she could not now discuss difficult questions, because she was preoccupied with the idea of going to Europe with her aunt, he declared that this was no answer at all; and it was to obtain a better one that he followed her across the seas. To say to herself that he was a kind of fate was well enough for a fanciful young woman, who was able to take much for granted in him; but the reader has a right to demand a description less metaphysical.

He was the son of a proprietor of certain well-known cotton-mills in Massachusetts—a gentleman who had accumulated a considerable fortune in the exercise of this industry. Caspar now managed the establishment, with a judgment and a brilliancy which, in spite of keen competition and languid years, had kept its prosperity from dwindling. He had received the better part of his education at Harvard University, where, however, he had gained more renown as a gymnast and an oarsman than as a votary of culture. Later, he had become reconciled to culture, and though he was still fond of sport, he was capable of showing an excellent understanding of other matters. He had a remarkable aptitude for mechanics, and had invented an improvement in the cotton-spinning process, which was now largely used and was known by his name. You might have seen his name in the papers in connection with this fruitful contrivance; assurance of which he had given to Isabel by showing her in the columns of the New York *Interviewer* an exhaustive article on the Goodwood patent—an article not prepared by Miss Stackpole, friendly as she had proved herself to his more sentimental interests. He had great talent for business, for administration, and for making people execute his purpose and carry out his views—for managing men, as the phrase was; and to give its complete value to this faculty, he had an insatiable, an almost fierce, ambition. It always struck people who knew him that he might do greater things than carry on a cotton-factory; there was nothing cottony about Caspar Goodwood, and his friends took for granted that he would not always content himself with that. He had once said to Isabel that, if the United States were only not such a confoundedly peaceful nation, he would find his proper place in the army. He keenly regretted that the Civil War should have terminated just as he had grown old enough to wear shoulder-straps, and was sure that if something of the same kind would only occur again, he would make a display of striking military talent. It pleased Isabel to believe that he had the qualities of a famous captain, and she answered that, if it would help him on, she shouldn't object to a war —a speech which ranked among the three or four most encouraging ones he had elicited from her, and of which the

value was not diminished by her subsequent regret at having said anything so heartless, inasmuch as she never communicated this regret to him. She liked at any rate this idea of his being potentially a commander of men—liked it much better than some other points in his character and appearance. She cared nothing about his cotton-mill, and the Goodwood patent left her imagination absolutely cold. She wished him not an inch less a man than he was; but she sometimes thought he would be rather nicer if he looked, for instance, a little differently. His jaw was too square and grim, and his figure too straight and stiff; these things suggested a want of easy adaptability to some of the occasions of life. Then she regarded with disfavour a habit he had of dressing always in the same manner; it was not apparently that he wore the same clothes continually, for, on the contrary, his garments had a way of looking rather too new. But they all seemed to be made of the same piece; the pattern, the cut, was in every case identical. She had reminded herself more than once that this was a frivolous objection to a man of Mr. Goodwood's importance; and then she had amended the rebuke by saying that it would be a frivolous objection if she were in love with him. She was not in love with him, and therefore she might criticise his small defects as well as his great ones—which latter consisted in the collective reproach of his being too serious, or, rather, not of his being too serious, for one could never be that, but of his seeming so. He showed his seriousness too simply, too artlessly; when one was alone with him he talked too much about the same subject, and when other people were present he talked too little about anything. And yet he was the strongest man she had ever known, and she believed that at bottom he was the cleverest. It was very strange; she was far from understanding the contradictions among her own impressions. Caspar Goodwood had never corresponded to her idea of a delightful person, and she supposed that this was why he was so unsatisfactory. When, however, Lord Warburton, who not only did correspond with it, but gave an extension to the term, appealed to her approval, she found herself still unsatisfied. It was certainly strange.

Such incongruities were not a help to answering Mr. Goodwood's letter, and Isabel determined to leave it a while unanswered. If he had determined to persecute her, he must take the consequences; foremost among which was his being left to perceive that she did not approve of his coming to Gardencourt. She was already liable to the incursions of one suitor at this place, and though it might be pleasant to be appreciated in opposite quarters, Isabel had a personal shrinking from entertaining two lovers at once, even in a case where the entertainment should consist of dismissing them. She sent no answer to Mr. Goodwood; but at the end of three days she wrote to Lord Warburton, and the letter belongs to our history. It ran as follows.

"Dear Lord Warburton—A great deal of careful reflection has not led me to change my mind about the suggestion you were so kind as to make me the other day. I do not find myself able to regard you in the light of a husband, or to regard your home—your various homes—in the light of my own. These things cannot be reasoned about, and I very earnestly entreat you not to return to the subject we discussed so exhaustively. We see our lives from our own point of view; that is the privilege of the weakest and humblest of us; and I shall never be able to see mine in the manner you proposed. Kindly let this suffice you, and do me the justice to believe that I have given your proposal the deeply respectful consideration it deserves. It is with this feeling of respect that I remain very truly yours,

"Isabel Archer."

While the author of this missive was making up her mind to despatch it, Henrietta Stackpole formed a resolution which was accompanied by no hesitation. She invited Ralph Touchett to take a walk with her in the garden, and when he had assented with that alacrity which seemed constantly to testify to his high expectations, she informed him that she had a favour to ask of him. It may be confided to the reader that at this information the young man flinched; for we know that Miss Stackpole had struck him as indiscreet. The movement was unreasonable, however; for he had measured the limits of her discretion as little as he had explored its extent; and he made a very civil profession of the desire to serve her. He was afraid of her, and he presently told her so.

"When you look at me in a certain way," he said, "my knees knock together, my faculties desert me; I am filled

with trepidation, and I ask only for strength to execute your commands. You have a look which I have never encountered in any woman."

"Well," Henrietta replied, good-humouredly, "if I had not known before that you were trying to turn me into ridicule, I should know it now. Of course I am easy game—I was brought up with such different customs and ideas. I am not used to your arbitrary standards, and I have never been spoken to in America as you have spoken to me. If a gentleman conversing with me over there, were to speak to me like that, I shouldn't know what to make of it. We take everything more naturally over there, and, after all, we are a great deal more simple. I admit that; I am very simple myself. Of course, if you choose to laugh at me for that, you are very welcome; but I think on the whole I would rather be myself than you. I am quite content to be myself; I don't want to change. There are plenty of people that appreciate me just as I am; it is true they are only Americans!" Henrietta had lately taken up the tone of helpless innocence and large concession. "I want you to assist me a little," she went on. "I don't care in the least whether I amuse you while you do so; or, rather, I am perfectly willing that your amusement should be your reward. I want you to help me about Isabel."

"Has she injured you?" Ralph asked.

"If she had I shouldn't mind, and I should never tell you. What I am afraid of is that she will injure herself."

"I think that is very possible," said Ralph.

His companion stopped in the garden-walk, fixing on him a gaze which may perhaps have contained the quality that caused his knees to knock together. "That, too, would amuse you, I suppose. The way you do say things! I never heard any one so indifferent."

"To Isabel? Never in the world."

"Well, you are not in love with her, I hope."

"How can that be, when I am in love with another?"

"You are in love with yourself, that's the other!" Miss Stackpole declared. "Much good may it do you! But if you wish to be serious once in your life, here's a chance; and if you really care for your cousin, here is an opportunity to prove it. I don't expect you to understand her; that's too

much to ask. But you needn't do that to grant my favour. I will supply the necessary intelligence."

"I shall enjoy that immensely!" Ralph exclaimed. "I will be Caliban, and you shall be Ariel."

"You are not at all like Caliban, because you are sophisticated, and Caliban was not. But I am not talking about imaginary characters; I am talking about Isabel. Isabel is intensely real. What I wish to tell you is that I find her fearfully changed."

"Since you came, do you mean?"

"Since I came, and before I came. She is not the same as she was."

"As she was in America?"

"Yes, in America. I suppose you know that she comes from there. She can't help it, but she does."

"Do you want to change her back again?"

"Of course I do; and I want you to help me."

"Ah," said Ralph, "I am only Caliban; I am not Prospero."

"You were Prospero enough to make her what she has become. You have acted on Isabel Archer since she came here, Mr. Touchett."

"I, my dear Miss Stackpole? Never in the world. Isabel Archer has acted on me—yes; she acts on every one. But I have been absolutely passive."

"You are too passive, then. You had better stir yourself and be careful. Isabel is changing every day; she is drifting away—right out to sea. I have watched her and I can see it. She is not the bright American girl she was. She is taking different views, and turning away from her old ideals. I want to save those ideals, Mr. Touchett, and that is where you come in."

"Not surely as an ideal?"

"Well, I hope not," Henrietta replied, promptly. "I have got a fear in my heart that she is going to marry one of these Europeans, and I want to prevent it."

"Ah, I see," cried Ralph; "and to prevent it, you want me to step in and marry her?"

"Not quite; that remedy would be as bad as the disease, for you are the typical European from whom I wish to rescue her. No; I wish you to take an interest in another person—

a young man to whom she once gave great encouragement, and whom she now doesn't seem to think good enough. He's a noble fellow, and a very dear friend of mine, and I wish very much you would invite him to pay a visit here."

Ralph was much puzzled by this appeal, and it is perhaps not to the credit of his purity of mind that he failed to look at it at first in the simplest light. It wore, to his eyes, a tortuous air, and his fault was that he was not quite sure that anything in the world could really be as candid as this request of Miss Stackpole's appeared. That a young woman should demand that a gentleman whom she described as her very dear friend should be furnished with an opportunity to make himself agreeable to another young woman, whose attention had wandered and whose charms were greater—this was an anomaly which for the moment challenged all his ingenuity of interpretation. To read between the lines was easier than to follow the text, and to suppose that Miss Stackpole wished the gentleman invited to Gardencourt on her own account was the sign not so much of a vulgar, as of an embarrassed, mind. Even from this venial act of vulgarity, however, Ralph was saved, and saved by a force that I can scarcely call anything less than inspiration. With no more outward light on the subject than he already possessed, he suddenly acquired the conviction that it would be a sovereign injustice to the correspondent of the *Interviewer* to assign a dishonourable motive to any act of hers. This conviction passed into his mind with extreme rapidity; it was perhaps kindled by the pure radiance of the young lady's imperturbable gaze. He returned this gaze a moment, consciously, resisting an inclination to frown, as one frowns in the presence of larger luminaries. "Who is the gentleman you speak of?"

"Mr. Caspar Goodwood, from Boston. He has been extremely attentive to Isabel—just as devoted to her as he can live. He has followed her out here, and he is at present in London. I don't know his address, but I guess I can obtain it."

"I have never heard of him," said Ralph.

"Well, I suppose you haven't heard of every one. I don't believe he has ever heard of you; but that is no reason why Isabel shouldn't marry him."

Ralph gave a small laugh. "What a rage you have for marrying people! Do you remember how you wanted to marry me the other day?"

"I have got over that. You don't know how to take such ideas. Mr. Goodwood does, however; and that's what I like about him. He's a splendid man and a perfect gentleman; and Isabel knows it."

"Is she very fond of him?"

"If she isn't she ought to be. He is simply wrapped up in her."

"And you wish me to ask him here," said Ralph, reflectively.

"It would be an act of true hospitality."

"Caspar Goodwood," Ralph continued—"it's rather a striking name."

"I don't care anything about his name. It might be Ezekiel Jenkins, and I should say the same. He is the only man I have ever seen whom I think worthy of Isabel."

"You are a very devoted friend," said Ralph.

"Of course I am. If you say that to laugh at me, I don't care."

"I don't say it to laugh at you; I am very much struck with it."

"You are laughing worse than ever; but I advise you not to laugh at Mr. Goodwood."

"I assure you I am very serious; you ought to understand that," said Ralph.

In a moment his companion understood it. "I believe you are; now you are too serious."

"You are difficult to please."

"Oh, you are very serious indeed. You won't invite Mr. Goodwood."

"I don't know," said Ralph. "I am capable of strange things. Tell me a little about Mr. Goodwood. What is he like?"

"He is just the opposite of you. He is at the head of a cotton factory; a very fine one."

"Has he pleasant manners?" asked Ralph.

"Splendid manners—in the American style."

"Would he be an agreeable member of our little circle?"

"I don't think he would care much about our little circle. He would concentrate on Isabel."

"And how would my cousin like that?"

"Very possibly not at all. But it will be good for her. It will call back her thoughts."

"Call them back—from where?"

"From foreign parts and other unnatural places. Three months ago she gave Mr. Goodwood every reason to suppose that he was acceptable to her, and it is not worthy of Isabel to turn her back upon a real friend simply because she has changed the scene. I have changed the scene too, and the effect of it has been to make me care more for my old associations than ever. It's my belief that the sooner Isabel changes it back again the better. I know her well enough to know that she would never be truly happy over here, and I wish her to form some strong American tie that will act as a preservative."

"Are you not a little too much in a hurry?" Ralph inquired. "Don't you think you ought to give her more of a chance in poor old England?"

"A chance to ruin her bright young life? One is never too much in a hurry to save a precious human creature from drowning."

"As I understand it, then," said Ralph, "you wish me to push Mr. Goodwood overboard after her. Do you know," he added, "that I have never heard her mention his name?"

Henrietta Stackpole gave a brilliant smile. "I am delighted to hear that; it proves how much she thinks of him."

Ralph appeared to admit that there was a good deal in this, and he surrendered himself to meditation, while his companion watched him askance. "If I should invite Mr. Goodwood," he said, "it would be to quarrel with him."

"Don't do that; he would prove the better man."

"You certainly are doing your best to make me hate him! I really don't think I can ask him. I should be afraid of being rude to him."

"It's just as you please," said Henrietta. "I had no idea you were in love with her yourself."

"Do you really believe that?" the young man asked, with lifted eyebrows.

"That's the most natural speech I have ever heard you make! Of course I believe it," Miss Stackpole answered, ingeniously.

"Well," said Ralph, "to prove to you that you are wrong, I will invite him. It must be, of course, as a friend of yours."

"It will not be as a friend of mine that he will come; and it will not be to prove to me that I am wrong that you will ask him—but to prove it to yourself!"

These last words of Miss Stackpole's (on which the two presently separated) contained an amount of truth which Ralph Touchett was obliged to recognise; but it so far took the edge from too sharp a recognition that, in spite of his suspecting that it would be rather more indiscreet to keep his promise than it would be to break it, he wrote Mr. Goodwood a note of six lines, expressing the pleasure it would give Mr. Touchett the elder that he should join a little party at Gardencourt, of which Miss Stackpole was a valued member. Having sent his letter (to the care of a banker whom Henrietta suggested) he waited in some suspense. He had heard of Mr. Casper Goodwood by name for the first time; for when his mother mentioned to him on her arrival that there was a story about the girl's having an "admirer" at home, the idea seemed deficient in reality, and Ralph took no pains to ask questions, the answers to which would suggest only the vague or the disagreeable. Now, however, the native admiration of which his cousin was the object had become more concrete; it took the form of a young man who had followed her to London; who was interested in a cotton-mill, and had manners in the American style. Ralph had two theories about this young man. Either his passion was a sentimental fiction of Miss Stackpole's (there was always a sort of tacit understanding among women, born of the solidarity of the sex, that they should discover or invent lovers for each other), in which case he was not to be feared, and would probably not accept the invitation; or else he would accept the invitation, and in this event would prove himself a creature too irrational to demand further consideration. The latter clause of Ralph's argument might have seemed incoherent; but it embodied his conviction, that if Mr. Goodwood were interested in Isabel in the serious manner described by Miss Stack-

pole, he would not care to present himself at Gardencourt on a summons from the latter lady. "On this supposition," said Ralph, "he must regard her as a thorn on the stem of his rose; as an intercessor he must find her wanting in tact."

Two days after he had sent his invitation he received a very short note from Caspar Goodwood, thanking him for it, regretting that other engagements made a visit to Gardencourt impossible, and presenting many compliments to Miss Stackpole. Ralph handed the note to Henrietta, who, when she had read it, exclaimed—

"Well, I never have heard of anything so stiff!"

"I am afraid he doesn't care so much about my cousin as you suppose," Ralph observed.

"No, it's not that; it's some deeper motive. His nature is very deep. But I am determined to fathom it, and I will write to him to know what he means."

His refusal of Ralph's overtures made this young man vaguely uncomfortable; from the moment he declined to come to Gardencourt Ralph began to think him of importance. He asked himself what it signified to him whether Isabel's admirers should be desperadoes or laggards; they were not rivals of his, and were perfectly welcome to act out their genius. Nevertheless he felt much curiosity as to the result of Miss Stackpole's promised inquiry into the causes of Mr. Goodwood's stiffness—a curiosity for the present ungratified, inasmuch as when he asked her three days later whether she had written to London, she was obliged to confess that she had written in vain. Mr. Goodwood had not answered her.

"I suppose he is thinking it over," she said; "he thinks everything over; he is not at all impulsive. But I am accustomed to having my letters answered the same day."

Whether it was to pursue her investigations, or whether it was in compliance with still larger interests, is a point which remains somewhat uncertain; at all events, she presently proposed to Isabel that they should make an excursion to London together.

"If I must tell the truth," she said, "I am not seeing much at this place, and I shouldn't think you were either. I have not even seen that aristocrat—what's his name?—Lord Washburton. He seems to let you severely alone."

"Lord Warburton is coming to-morrow, I happen to know," replied Isabel, who had received a note from the master of Lockleigh in answer to her own letter. "You will have every opportunity of examining him."

"Well, he may do for one letter, but what is one letter when you want to write fifty? I have described all the scenery in this vicinity, and raved about all the old women and donkeys. You may say what you please, scenery makes a thin letter. I must go back to London and get some impressions of real life. I was there but three days before I came away, and that is hardly time to get started."

As Isabel, on her journey from New York to Gardencourt, had seen even less of the metropolis than this, it appeared a happy suggestion of Henrietta's that the two should go thither on a visit of pleasure. The idea struck Isabel as charming; she had a great desire to see something of London, which had always been the city of her imagination. They turned over their scheme together and indulged in visions of æsthetic hours. They would stay at some picturesque old inn —one of the inns described by Dickens—and drive over the town in those delightful hansoms. Henrietta was a literary woman, and the great advantage of being a literary woman was that you could go everywhere and do everything. They would dine at a coffee-house, and go afterwards to the play; they would frequent the Abbey and the British Museum, and find out where Doctor Johnson had lived, and Goldsmith and Addison. Isabel grew eager, and presently mentioned these bright intentions to Ralph, who burst into a fit of laughter, which did not express the sympathy she had desired.

"It's a delightful plan," he said. "I advise you to go to the Tavistock Hotel in Covent Garden, an easy, informal, old-fashioned place, and I will have you put down at my club."

"Do you mean it's improper?" Isabel asked. "Dear me, isn't anything proper here? With Henrietta, surely I may go anywhere; she isn't hampered in that way. She has travelled over the whole American continent, and she can surely find her way about this simple little island."

"Ah, then," said Ralph, "let me take advantage of her protection to go up to town as well. I may never have a chance to travel so safely!"

CHAPTER XIV

MISS STACKPOLE would have prepared to start for London immediately; but Isabel, as we have seen, had been notified that Lord Warburton would come again to Gardencourt, and she believed it to be her duty to remain there and see him. For four or five days he had made no answer to her letter; then he had written, very briefly, to say that he would come to lunch two days later. There was something in these delays and postponements that touched the girl, and renewed her sense of his desire to be considerate and patient, not to appear to urge her too grossly; a discretion the more striking that she was so sure he really liked her. Isabel told her uncle that she had written to him, and let Mr. Touchett know of Lord Warburton's intention of coming; and the old man, in consequence, left his room earlier than usual, and made his appearance at the lunch-table. This was by no means an act of vigilance on his part, but the fruit of a benevolent belief that his being of the company might help to cover the visitor's temporary absence, in case Isabel should find it needful to give Lord Warburton another hearing. This personage drove over from Lockleigh, and brought the elder of his sisters with him, a measure presumably dictated by considerations of the same order as Mr. Touchett's. The two visitors were introduced to Miss Stackpole, who, at luncheon, occupied a seat adjoining Lord Warburton's. Isabel, who was nervous, and had no relish of the prospect of again arguing the question he had so precipitately opened, could not help admiring his good-humoured self-possession, which quite disguised the symptoms of that admiration it was natural she should suppose him to feel. He neither looked at her nor spoke to her, and the only sign of his emotion was that he avoided meeting her eye. He had plenty of talk for the others, however, and he appeared to eat his luncheon with discrimination and appetite. Miss Molyneux, who had a smooth, nun-like forehead, and wore a large silver

cross suspended from her neck, was evidently preoccupied with Henrietta Stackpole, upon whom her eyes constantly rested in a manner which seemed to denote a conflict between attention and alienation. Of the two ladies from Lockleigh, she was the one that Isabel had liked best; there was such a world of hereditary quiet in her. Isabel was sure, moreover, that her mild forehead and silver cross had a romantic meaning—that she was a member of a High Church sisterhood, had taken some picturesque vows. She wondered what Miss Molyneux would think of her if she knew Miss Archer had refused her brother; and then she felt sure that Miss Molyneux would never know—that Lord Warburton never told her such things. He was fond of her and kind to her, but on the whole he told her little. Such, at least, was Isabel's theory; when, at table, she was not occupied in conversation, she was usually occupied in forming theories about her neighbours. According to Isabel, if Miss Molyneux should ever learn what had passed between Miss Archer and Lord Warburton, she would probably be shocked at the young lady's indifference to such an opportunity; or no, rather (this was our heroine's last impression) she would impute to the young American a high sense of general fitness.

Whatever Isabel might have made of her opportunities, Henrietta Stackpole was by no means disposed to neglect those in which she now found herself immersed.

"Do you know you are the first lord I have ever seen?" she said, very promptly, to her neighbour. "I suppose you think I am awfully benighted."

"You have escaped seeing some very ugly men," Lord Warburton answered, looking vaguely about the table and laughing a little.

"Are they very ugly? They try to make us believe in America that they are all handsome and magnificent, and that they wear wonderful robes and crowns."

"Ah, the robes and crowns are gone out of fashion," said Lord Warburton, "like your tomahawks and revolvers."

"I am sorry for that; I think an aristocracy ought to be splendid," Henrietta declared. "If it is not that, what is it?"

"Oh, you know, it isn't much, at the best," Lord Warburton answered. "Won't you have a potato?"

"I don't care much for these European potatoes. I shouldn't know you from an ordinary American gentleman."

"Do talk to me as if I were one," said Lord Warburton. "I don't see how you manage to get on without potatoes; you must find so few things to eat over here."

Henrietta was silent a moment; there was a chance that he was not sincere.

"I have had hardly any appetite since I have been here," she went on at last; "so it doesn't much matter. I don't approve of *you*, you know; I feel as if I ought to tell you that."

"Don't approve of me?"

"Yes, I don't suppose any one ever said such a thing to you before, did they? I don't approve of lords, as an institution. I think the world has got beyond that—far beyond."

"Oh, so do I. I don't approve of myself in the least. Sometimes it comes over me—how I should object to myself if I were not myself, don't you know? But that's rather good, by the way—not to be vain-glorious."

"Why don't you give it up, then?" Miss Stackpole inquired.

"Give up—a—?" asked Lord Warburton, meeting her harsh inflection with a very mellow one.

"Give up being a lord."

"Oh, I am so little of one! One would really forget all about it, if you wretched Americans were not constantly reminding one. However, I do think of giving up—the little there is left of it—one of these days."

"I should like to see you do it," Henrietta exclaimed, rather grimly.

"I will invite you to the ceremony; we will have a supper and a dance."

"Well," said Miss Stackpole, "I like to see all sides. I don't approve of a privileged class, but I like to hear what they have got to say for themselves."

"Mighty little, as you see!"

"I should like to draw you out a little more," Henrietta continued. "But you are always looking away. You are afraid of meeting my eye. I see you want to escape me."

"No, I am only looking for those despised potatoes."

"Please explain about that young lady—your sister—then. I don't understand about her. Is she a Lady?"

"She's a capital good girl."

"I don't like the way you say that—as if you wanted to change the subject. Is her position inferior to yours?"

"We neither of us have any position to speak of; but she is better off than I, because she has none of the bother."

"Yes, she doesn't look as if she had much bother. I wish I had as little bother as that. You do produce quiet people over here, whatever you may do."

"Ah, you see one takes life easily, on the whole," said Lord Warburton. "And then you know we are very dull. Ah, we can be dull when we try!"

"I should advise you to try something else. I shouldn't know what to talk to your sister about; she looks so different. Is that silver cross a badge?"

"A badge?"

"A sign of rank."

Lord Warburton's glance had wandered a good deal, but at this it met the gaze of his neighbour.

"Oh, yes," he answered, in a moment; "the women go in for those things. The silver cross is worn by the eldest daughters of Viscounts."

This was his harmless revenge for having occasionally had his credulity too easily engaged in America.

After lunch he proposed to Isabel to come into the gallery and look at the pictures; and though she knew that he had seen the pictures twenty times, she complied without criticising this pretext. Her conscience now was very easy; ever since she sent him her letter she had felt particularly light of spirit. He walked slowly to the end of the gallery, staring at the paintings and saying nothing; and then he suddenly broke out—

"I hoped you wouldn't write to me that way."

"It was the only way, Lord Warburton," said the girl. "Do try and believe that."

"If I could believe it, of course I should let you alone. But we can't believe by willing it; and I confess I don't understand. I could understand your disliking me; that I could understand well. But that you should admit what you do——"

"What have I admitted?" Isabel interrupted, blushing a little.

"That you think me a good fellow; isn't that it?" She said nothing, and he went on—"You don't seem to have any reason, and that gives me a sense of injustice."

"I have a reason, Lord Warburton," said the girl; and she said it in a tone that made his heart contract.

"I should like very much to know it."

"I will tell you some day when there is more to show for it."

"Excuse my saying that in the meantime I must doubt of it."

"You make me very unhappy," said Isabel.

"I am not sorry for that; it may help you to know how I feel. Will you kindly answer me a question?" Isabel made no audible assent, but he apparently saw something in her eyes which gave him courage to go on. "Do you prefer some one else?"

"That's a question I would rather not answer."

"Ah, you *do* then!" her suitor murmured with bitterness.

The bitterness touched her, and she cried out—

"You are mistaken! I don't."

He sat down on a bench, unceremoniously, doggedly, like a man in trouble; leaning his elbows on his knees and staring at the floor.

"I can't even be glad of that," he said at last, throwing himself back against the wall, "for that would be an excuse."

Isabel raised her eyebrows, with a certain eagerness.

"An excuse? Must I excuse myself?"

He paid, however, no answer to the question. Another idea had come into his head.

"Is it my political opinions? Do you think I go too far?"

"I can't object to your political opinions, Lord Warburton," said the girl, "because I don't understand them."

"You don't care what I think," he cried, getting up. "It's all the same to you."

Isabel walked away, to the other side of the gallery, and stood there, showing him her charming back, her light slim figure, the length of her white neck as she bent her head, and the density of her dark braids. She stopped in front of a small picture, as if for the purpose of examining it; and there was something young and flexible in her movement, which her

companion noticed. Isabel's eyes, however, saw nothing; they had suddenly been suffused with tears. In a moment he followed her, and by this time she had brushed her tears away; but when she turned round, her face was pale, and the expression of her eyes was strange.

"That reason that I wouldn't tell you," she said, "I will tell it you, after all. It is that I can't escape my fate."

"Your fate?"

"I should try to escape it if I should marry you."

"I don't understand. Why should not that be your fate, as well as anything else?"

"Because it is not," said Isabel, femininely. "I know it is not. It's not my fate to give up—I know it can't be."

Poor Lord Warburton stared, with an interrogative point in either eye.

"Do you call marrying me giving up?"

"Not in the usual sense. It is getting—getting—getting a great deal. But it is giving up other chances."

"Other chances?" Lord Warburton repeated, more and more puzzled.

"I don't mean chances to marry," said Isabel, her colour rapidly coming back to her. And then she stopped, looking down with a deep frown, as if it were hopeless to attempt to make her meaning clear.

"I don't think it is presumptuous in me to say that I think you will gain more than you will lose," Lord Warburton observed.

"I can't escape unhappiness," said Isabel. "In marrying you, I shall be trying to."

"I don't know whether you would try to, but you certainly would: that I must in candour admit!" Lord Warburton exclaimed, with an anxious laugh.

"I must not—I can't!" cried the girl.

"Well, if you are bent on being miserable, I don't see why you should make me so. Whatever charms unhappiness may have for you, it has none for me."

"I am not bent on being miserable," said Isabel. "I have always been intensely determined to be happy, and I have often believed I should be. I have told people that; you can ask them. But it comes over me every now and then that I

can never be happy in any extraordinary way; not by turning away, by separating yourself."

"By separating yourself from what?"

"From life. From the usual chances and dangers, from what most people know and suffer."

Lord Warburton broke into a smile that almost denoted hope.

"Why, my dear Miss Archer," he began to explain, with the most considerate eagerness, "I don't offer you any exoneration from life, or from any chances or dangers whatever. I wish I could; depend upon it I would! For what do you take me, pray? Heaven help me, I am not the Emperor of China! All I offer you is the chance of taking the common lot in a comfortable sort of way. The common lot? Why, I am devoted to the common lot! Strike an alliance with me, and I promise you that you shall have plenty of it. You shall separate from nothing whatever—not even from your friend Miss Stackpole."

"She would never approve of it," said Isabel, trying to smile and take advantage of this side-issue; despising herself too, not a little, for doing so.

"Are we speaking of Miss Stackpole?" Lord Warburton asked, impatiently. "I never saw a person judge things on such theoretic grounds."

"Now I suppose you are speaking of me," said Isabel, with humility; and she turned away again, for she saw Miss Molyneux enter the gallery, accompanied by Henrietta and by Ralph.

Lord Warburton's sister addressed him with a certain timidity, and reminded him that she ought to return home in time for tea, as she was expecting some company. He made no answer—apparently not having heard her; he was preoccupied—with good reason. Miss Molyneux looked lady-like and patient, and awaited his pleasure.

"Well, I never, Miss Molyneux!" said Henrietta Stackpole.

"If I wanted to go, he would have to go. If I wanted my brother to do a thing, he would have to do it."

"Oh, Warburton does everything one wants," Miss Molyneux answered, with a quick, shy laugh. "How very many pictures you have!" she went on, turning to Ralph.

"They look a good many, because they are all put together," said Ralph. "But it's really a bad way."

"Oh, I think it's so nice. I wish we had a gallery at Lockleigh. I am so very fond of pictures," Miss Molyneux went on, persistently, to Ralph, as if she were afraid that Miss Stackpole would address her again. Henrietta appeared at once to fascinate and to frighten her.

"Oh yes, pictures are very indispensable," said Ralph, who appeared to know better what style of reflection was acceptable to her.

"They are so very pleasant when it rains," the young lady continued. "It rains so very often."

"I am sorry you are going away, Lord Warburton," said Henrietta. "I wanted to get a great deal more out of you."

"I am not going away," Lord Warburton answered.

"Your sister says you must. In America the gentlemen obey the ladies."

"I am afraid we have got some people to tea," said Miss Molyneux, looking at her brother.

"Very good, my dear. We'll go."

"I hoped you would resist!" Henrietta exclaimed. "I wanted to see what Miss Molyneux would do."

"I never do anything," said this young lady.

"I suppose in your position it's sufficient for you to exist," Miss Stackpole rejoined. "I should like very much to see you at home."

"You must come to Lockleigh again," said Miss Molyneux, very sweetly, to Isabel, ignoring this remark of Isabel's friend.

Isabel looked into her quiet eyes a moment, and for that moment seemed to see in their grey depths the reflection of everything she had rejected in rejecting Lord Warburton—the peace, the kindness, the honour, the possessions, a deep security and a great exclusion. She kissed Miss Molyneux, and then she said—

"I am afraid I can never come again."

"Never again?"

"I am afraid I am going away.'"

"Oh, I am so very sorry," said Miss Molyneux. "I think that's so very wrong of you."

Lord Warburton watched this little passage; then he turned away and stared at a picture. Ralph, leaning against the rail before the picture, with his hands in his pockets, had for the moment been watching him.

"I should like to see you at home," said Henrietta, whom Lord Warburton found beside him. "I should like an hour's talk with you; there are a great many questions I wish to ask you."

"I shall be delighted to see you," the proprietor of Lockleigh answered; "but I am certain not to be able to answer many of your questions. When will you come?"

"Whenever Miss Archer will take me. We are thinking of going to London, but we will go and see you first. I am determined to get some satisfaction out of you."

"If it depends upon Miss Archer, I am afraid you won't get much. She will not come to Lockleigh; she doesn't like the place."

"She told me it was lovely!" said Henrietta.

Lord Warburton hesitated a moment. "She won't come, all the same. You had better come alone," he added.

Henrietta straightened herself, and her large eyes expanded.

"Would you make that remark to an English lady?" she inquired, with soft asperity.

Lord Warburton stared.

"Yes, if I liked her enough."

"You would be careful not to like her enough. If Miss Archer won't visit your place again, it's because she doesn't want to take me. I know what she thinks of me, and I suppose you think the same—that I oughtn't to bring in individuals."

Lord Warburton was at a loss; he had not been made acquainted with Miss Stackpole's professional character, and did not catch her allusion.

"Miss Archer has been warning you!" she went on.

"Warning me?"

"Isn't that why she came off alone with you here—to put you on your guard?"

"Oh, dear no," said Lord Warburton, blushing; "our talk had no such solemn character as that."

"Well, you have been on your guard—intensely. I suppose it's natural to you; that's just what I wanted to observe. And so, too, Miss Molyneux—she wouldn't commit herself. *You* have been warned, anyway," Henrietta continued addressing this young lady, "but for you it wasn't necessary."

"I hope not," said Miss Molyneux, vaguely.

"Miss Stackpole takes notes," Ralph explained, humorously. "She is a great satirist; she goes through us all, and she works us up."

"Well, I must say I never have had such a collection of bad material!" Henrietta declared, looking from Isabel to Lord Warburton, and from this nobleman to his sister and to Ralph. "There is something the matter with you all; you are as dismal as if you had got a bad telegram."

"You do see through us, Miss Stackpole," said Ralph in a low tone, giving her a little intelligent nod, as he led the party out of the gallery. "There is something the matter with us all."

Isabel came behind these two; Miss Molyneux, who decidedly liked her immensely, had taken her arm, to walk beside her over the polished floor. Lord Warburton strolled on the other side, with his hands behind him, and his eyes lowered. For some moments he said nothing; and then—

"Is it true that you are going to London?" he asked.

"I believe it has been arranged."

"And when shall you come back?"

"In a few days; but probably for a very short time. I am going to Paris with my aunt."

"When, then, shall I see you again?"

"Not for a good while," said Isabel; "but some day or other, I hope."

"Do you really hope it?"

"Very much."

He went a few steps in silence; then he stopped, and put out his hand.

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye," said Isabel.

Miss Molyneux kissed her again, and she let the two depart; after which, without rejoining Henrietta and Ralph, she retreated to her own room.

In this apartment, before dinner, she was found by Mrs. Touchett, who had stopped on her way to the drawing-room.

"I may as well tell you," said her aunt, "that your uncle has informed me of your relations with Lord Warburton."

Isabel hesitated an instant.

"Relations? They are hardly relations. That is the strange part of it; he has seen me but three or four times."

"Why did you tell your uncle rather than me?" Mrs. Touchett inquired, dryly, but dispassionately.

Again Isabel hesitated.

"Because he knows Lord Warburton better."

"Yes, but I know you better."

"I am not sure of that," said Isabel, smiling.

"Neither am I, after all; especially when you smile that way. One would think you had carried off a prize! I suppose that when you refuse an offer like Lord Warburton's it's because you expect to do something better."

"Ah, my uncle didn't say that!" cried Isabel, smiling still.

CHAPTER XV

IT had been arranged that the two young ladies should proceed to London under Ralph's escort, though Mrs. Touchett looked with little favour upon the plan. It was just the sort of plan, she said, that Miss Stackpole would be sure to suggest, and she inquired if the correspondent of the *Interviewer* was to take the party to stay at a boarding-house.

"I don't care where she takes us to stay, so long as there is local colour," said Isabel. "That is what we are going to London for."

"I suppose that after a girl has refused an English lord she may do anything," her aunt rejoined. "After that one needn't stand on trifles."

"Should you have liked me to marry Lord Warburton?" Isabel inquired.

"Of course I should."

"I thought you disliked the English so much."

"So I do; but it's all the more reason for making use of them."

"Is that your idea of marriage?" And Isabel ventured to add that her aunt appeared to her to have made very little use of Mr. Touchett.

"Your uncle is not an English nobleman," said Mrs. Touchett, "though even if he had been, I should still probably have taken up my residence in Florence."

"Do you think Lord Warburton could make me any better than I am?" the girl asked, with some animation. "I don't mean that I am too good to improve. I mean—I mean that I don't love Lord Warburton enough to marry him."

"You did right to refuse him, then," said Mrs. Touchett, in her little spare voice. "Only, the next great offer you get, I hope you will manage to come up to your standard."

"We had better wait till the offer comes, before we talk about it. I hope very much that I may have no more offers for the present. They bother me fearfully."

"You probably won't be troubled with them if you adopt permanently the Bohemian manner of life. However, I have promised Ralph not to criticise the affair."

"I will do whatever Ralph says is right," Isabel said. "I have unbounded confidence in Ralph."

"His mother is much obliged to you!" cried this lady, with a laugh.

"It seems to me she ought to be," Isabel rejoined, smiling.

Ralph had assured her that there would be no violation of decency in their paying a visit—the little party of three—to the sights of the metropolis; but Mrs. Touchett took a different view. Like many ladies of her country who have lived a long time in Europe, she had completely lost her native tact on such points, and in her reaction, not in itself deplorable, against the liberty allowed to young persons beyond the seas, had fallen into gratuitous and exaggerated scruples. Ralph accompanied the two young ladies to town and established them at a quiet inn in a street that ran at right angles to Piccadilly. His first idea had been to take them to his father's house in Winchester Square, a large, dull mansion, which at this period of the year was shrouded in silence and brown holland; but he bethought himself that, the cook being at Gardencourt, there was no one in the house to get them their meals; and Pratt's Hotel accordingly became their resting-place. Ralph, on his side, found quarters in Winchester Square, having a "den" there of which he was very fond, and not being dependent on the local *cuisine*. He availed himself largely indeed of that at Pratt's Hotel, beginning his day with an early visit to his fellow-travellers, who had Mr. Pratt in person, in a large bulging white waistcoat, to remove their dish-covers. Ralph turned up, as he said, after breakfast, and the little party made out a scheme of entertainment for the day. As London does not wear in the month of September its most brilliant face, the young man, who occasionally took an apologetic tone, was obliged to remind his companion, to Miss Stackpole's high irritation, that there was not a creature in town.

"I suppose you mean that the aristocracy are absent," Henrietta answered; "but I don't think you could have a better proof that if they were absent altogether they would not be

missed. It seems to me the place is about as full as it can be. There is no one here, of course, except three or four millions of people. What is it you call them—the lower-middle class? They are only the population of London, and that is of no consequence."

Ralph declared that for him the aristocracy left no void that Miss Stackpole herself did not fill, and that a more contented man was nowhere at that moment to be found. In this he spoke the truth, for the stale September days, in the huge half-empty town, borrowed a charm from his circumstances. When he went home at night to the empty house in Winchester Square, after a day spent with his inquisitive countrywomen, he wandered into the big dusky dining-room, where the candle he took from the hall-table, after letting himself in, constituted the only illumination. The square was still, the house was still; when he raised one of the windows of the dining-room to let in the air, he heard the slow creak of the boots of a solitary policeman. His own step, in the empty room, seemed loud and sonorous; some of the carpets had been raised, and whenever he moved he roused a melancholy echo. He sat down in one of the armchairs; the big, dark dining table twinkled here and there in the small candle-light; the pictures on the wall, all of them very brown, looked vague and incoherent. There was a ghostly presence in the room, as of dinners long since digested, of table-talk that had lost its actuality. This hint of the supernatural perhaps had something to do with the fact that Ralph's imagination took a flight, and that he remained in his chair a long time beyond the hour at which he should have been in bed; doing nothing, not even reading the evening paper. I say he did nothing, and I maintain the phrase in the face of the fact that he thought at these moments of Isabel. To think of Isabel could only be for Ralph an idle pursuit, leading to nothing and profiting little to any one. His cousin had not yet seemed to him so charming as during these days spent in sounding, tourist-fashion, the deeps and shallows of the metropolitan element. Isabel was constantly interested and often excited; if she had come in search of local colour she found it everywhere. She asked more questions than he could answer, and launched little theories that he was equally unable to accept or to refute.

The party went more than once to the British Museum, and to that brighter palace of art which reclaims for antique variety so large an area of a monotonous suburb; they spent a morning in the Abbey and went on a penny-steamer to the Tower; they looked at pictures both in public and private collections, and sat on various occasions beneath the great trees in Kensington Gardens. Henrietta Stackpole proved to be an indefatigable sight-seer and a more good-natured critic than Ralph had ventured to hope. She had indeed many disappointments, and London at large suffered from her vivid remembrance of many of the cities of her native land; but she made the best of its dingy peculiarities and only heaved an occasional sigh, and uttered a desultory "Well!" which led no further and lost itself in retrospect. The truth was that, as she said herself, she was not in her element. "I have not a sympathy with inanimate objects," she remarked to Isabel at the National Gallery; and she continued to suffer from the meagreness of the glimpse that had as yet been vouchsafed to her of the inner life. Landscapes by Turner and Assyrian bulls were a poor substitute for the literary dinner-parties at which she had hoped to meet the genius and renown of Great Britain.

"Where are your public men, where are your men and women of intellect?" she inquired of Ralph, standing in the middle of Trafalgar Square, as if she had supposed this to be a place where she would naturally meet a few. "That's one of them on the top of the column, you say—Lord Nelson? Was he a lord too? Wasn't he high enough, that they had to stick him a hundred feet in the air? That's the past—I don't care about the past; I want to see some of the leading minds of the present. I won't say of the future, because I don't believe much in your future." Poor Ralph had few leading minds among his acquaintance, and rarely enjoyed the pleasure of button-holding a celebrity; a state of things which appeared to Miss Stackpole to indicate a deplorable want of enterprise. "If I were on the other side I should call," she said, "and tell the gentleman, whoever he might be, that I had heard a great deal about him and had come to see for myself. But I gather from what you say that this is not the custom here. You seem to have plenty of meaningless customs, and

none of those that one really wants. We *are* in advance, certainly. I suppose I shall have to give up the social side altogether;" and Henrietta, though she went about with her guide-book and pencil, and wrote a letter to the *Interviewer* about the Tower (in which she described the execution of Lady Jane Grey), had a depressing sense of falling below her own standard.

The incident which had preceded Isabel's departure from Gardencourt left a painful trace in the girl's mind; she took no pleasure in recalling Lord Warburton's magnanimous disappointment. She could not have done less than what she did; this was certainly true. But her necessity, all the same, had been a distasteful one, and she felt no desire to take credit for her conduct. Nevertheless, mingled with this absence of an intellectual relish of it, was a feeling of freedom which in itself was sweet, and which, as she wandered through the great city with her ill-matched companions, occasionally throbbed into joyous excitement. When she walked in Kensington Gardens, she stopped the children (mainly of the poorer sort) whom she saw playing on the grass; she asked them their names and gave them sixpence, and when they were pretty she kissed them. Ralph noticed such incidents; he noticed everything that Isabel did.

One afternoon, by way of amusing his companions, he invited them to tea in Winchester Square, and he had the house set in order as much as possible, to do honour to their visit. There was another guest, also, to meet the ladies, an amiable bachelor, an old friend of Ralph's, who happened to be in town, and who got on uncommonly well with Miss Stackpole. Mr. Bantling, a stout, fair, smiling man of forty, who was extraordinarily well dressed, and whose contributions to the conversation were characterised by vivacity rather than continuity, laughed immoderately at everything Henrietta said, gave her several cups of tea, examined in her society the *bric-à-brac,* of which Ralph had a considerable collection, and afterwards, when the host proposed they should go out into the square and pretend it was a *fête-champêtre,* walked round the limited inclosure several times with her and listened with candid interest to her remarks upon the inner life.

"Oh, I see," said Mr. Bantling; "I dare say you found it very quiet at Gardencourt. Naturally there's not much going on there when there's such a lot of illness about. Touchett's very bad, you know; the doctors have forbid his being in England at all, and he has only come back to take care of his father. The old man, I believe, has half-a-dozen things the matter with him. They call it gout, but to my certain knowledge he is dropsical as well, though he doesn't look it. You may depend upon it he has got a lot of water somewhere. Of course that sort of thing makes it awfully slow for people in the house; I wonder they have them under such circumstances. Then I believe Mr. Touchett is always squabbling with his wife; she lives away from her husband, you know, in that extraordinary American way of yours. If you want a house where there is always something going on, I recommend you to go down and stay with my sister, Lady Pensil, in Bedfordshire. I'll write to her to-morrow, and I'm sure she'll be delighted to ask you. I know just what you want—you want a house where they go in for theatricals and picnics and that sort of thing. My sister is just that sort of woman; she is always getting up something or other, and she is always glad to have the sort of people that help her. I am sure she'll ask you down by return of post; she is tremendously fond of distinguished people and writers. She writes herself, you know; but I haven't read everything she has written. It's usually poetry, and I don't go in much for poetry—unless it's Byron. I suppose you think a great deal of Byron in America," Mr. Bantling continued, expanding in the stimulating air of Miss Stackpole's attention, bringing up his sequences promptly, and at last changing his topic, with a natural eagerness to provide suitable conversation for so remarkable a woman. He returned, however, ultimately to the idea of Henrietta's going to stay with Lady Pensil in Bedfordshire. "I understand what you want," he repeated; "you want to see some genuine English sport. The Touchetts are not English at all, you know; they live on a kind of foreign system; they have got some awfully queer ideas. The old man thinks it's wicked to hunt, I am told. You must get down to my sister's in time for the theatricals, and I am sure she will be glad to give you a part. I am sure you act well; I know you are very

clever. My sister is forty years old, and she has seven children; but she is going to play the principal part. Of course you needn't act if you don't want to."

In this manner Mr. Banting delivered himself, while they strolled over the grass in Winchester Square, which, although it had been peppered by the London soot, invited the tread to linger. Henrietta thought her blooming, easy-voiced bachelor, with his impressibility to feminine merit and his suggestiveness of allusion, a very agreeable man, and she valued the opportunity he offered her.

"I don't know but I would go, if your sister should ask me," she said. "I think it would be my duty. What do you call her name?"

"Pensil. It's an odd name, but it isn't a bad one."

"I think one name is as good as another. But what is her rank?"

"Oh, she's a baron's wife; a convenient sort of rank. You are fine enough, and you are not too fine."

"I don't know but what she'd be too fine for me. What do you call the place she lives in—Bedfordshire?"

"She lives away in the northern corner of it. It's a tiresome country, but I daresay you won't mind it. I'll try and run down while you are there."

All this was very pleasant to Miss Stackpole, and she was sorry to be obliged to separate from Lady Pensil's obliging brother. But it happened that she had met the day before, in Piccadilly, some friends whom she had not seen for a year; the Miss Climbers, two ladies from Wilmington, Delaware, who had been travelling on the continent and were now preparing to re-embark. Henrietta had a long interview with them on the Piccadilly pavement, and though the three ladies all talked at once, they had not exhausted their accumulated topics. It had been agreed therefore that Henrietta should come and dine with them in their lodgings in Jermyn Street at six o'clock on the morrow, and she now bethought herself of this engagement. She prepared to start for Jermyn Street, taking leave first of Ralph Touchett and Isabel, who, seated on garden chairs in another part of the inclosure, were occupied—if the term may be used—with an exchange of amenities less pointed than the practical colloquy of Miss Stack-

pole and Mr. Bantling. When it had been settled between Isabel and her friend that they should be re-united at some reputable hour at Pratt's Hotel, Ralph remarked that the latter must have a cab. She could not walk all the way to Jermyn Street.

"I suppose you mean it's improper for me to walk alone!" Henrietta exclaimed. "Merciful powers, have I come to this?"

"There is not the slightest need of your walking alone." said Mr. Bantling, in an off-hand tone expressive of gallantry. "I should be greatly pleased to go with you."

"I simply meant that you would be late for dinner," Ralph answered. "Think of those poor ladies, in their impatience, waiting for you."

"You had better have a hansom, Henrietta," said Isabel.

"I will get you a hansom, if you will trust to me," Mr. Bantling went on. "We might walk a little till we met one."

"I don't see why I shouldn't trust to him, do you?" Henrietta inquired of Isabel.

"I don't see what Mr. Bantling could do to you," Isabel answered, smiling; "but if you like, we will walk with you till you find your cab."

"Never mind; we will go alone. Come on, Mr. Bantling, and take care you get me a good one."

Mr. Bantling promised to do his best, and the two took their departure, leaving Isabel and her cousin standing in the square, over which a clear September twilight had now begun to gather. It was perfectly still; the wide quadrangle of dusky houses showed lights in none of the windows, where the shutters and blinds were closed; the pavements were a vacant expanse, and putting aside two small children from a neighbouring slum, who, attracted by symptoms of abnormal animation in the interior, were squeezing their necks between the rusty railings of the inclosure, the most vivid object within sight was the big red pillar-post on the south-east corner.

"Henrietta will ask him to get into the cab and go with her to Jermyn Street," Ralph observed. He always spoke of Miss Stackpole as Henrietta.

"Very possibly," said his companion.

"Or rather, no, she won't," he went on. "But Bantling will ask leave to get in."

"Very likely again. I am very glad they are such good friends."

"She has made a conquest. He thinks her a brilliant woman. It may go far," said Ralph.

Isabel was silent a moment.

"I call Henrietta a very brilliant woman; but I don't think it will go far," she rejoined at last. "They would never really know each other. He has not the least idea what she really is, and she has no just comprehension of Mr. Bantling."

"There is no more usual basis of matrimony than a mutual misunderstanding. But it ought not to be so difficult to understand Bob Bantling," Ralph added. "He is a very simple fellow."

"Yes, but Henrietta is simpler still. And pray, what am I to do?" Isabel asked, looking about her through the fading light, in which the limited landscape-gardening of the square took on a large and effective appearance. "I don't imagine that you will propose that you and I, for our amusement, should drive about London in a hansom."

"There is no reason why we should not stay here—if you don't dislike it. It is very warm; there will be half-an-hour yet before dark; and if you permit it, I will light a cigarette."

"You may do what you please," said Isabel, "if you will amuse me till seven o'clock. I propose at that hour to go back and partake of a simple and solitary repast—two poached eggs and a muffin—at Pratt's Hotel.

"May I not dine with you?" Ralph asked.

"No, you will dine at your club."

They had wandered back to their chairs in the centre of the square again, and Ralph had lighted his cigarette. It would have given him extreme pleasure to be present in person at the modest little feast she had sketched; but in default of this he liked even being forbidden. For the moment, however, he liked immensely being alone with her, in the thickening dusk, in the centre of the multitudinous town; it made her seem to depend upon him and to be in

his power. This power he could exert but vaguely; the best exercise of it was to accept her decisions submissively. There was almost an emotion in doing so.

"Why won't you let me dine with you?" he asked, after a pause.

"Because I don't care for it."

"I suppose you are tired of me."

"I shall be an hour hence. You see I have the gift of fore-knowledge."

"Oh, I shall be delightful meanwhile," said Ralph. But he said nothing more, and as Isabel made no rejoinder, they sat some time in silence which seemed to contradict his promise of entertainment. It seemed to him that she was preoccupied, and he wondered what she was thinking about; there were two or three very possible subjects. At last he spoke again. "Is your objection to my society this evening caused by your expectation of another visitor?"

She turned her head with a glance of her clear, fair eyes. "Another visitor? What visitor should I have?"

He had none to suggest; which made his question seem to himself silly as well as brutal.

"You have a great many friends that I don't know," he said, laughing a little awkwardly. "You have a whole past from which I was perversely excluded."

"You were reserved for my future. You must remember that my past is over there across the water. There is none of it here in London."

"Very good, then, since your future is seated beside you. Capital thing to have your future so handy." And Ralph lighted another cigarette and reflected that Isabel probably meant that she had received news that Mr. Caspar Goodwood had crossed to Paris. After he had lighted his cigarette he puffed it a while, and then he went on. "I promised a while ago to be very amusing; but you see I don't come up to the mark, and the fact is there is a good deal of temerity in my undertaking to amuse a person like you. What do you care for my feeble attempts? You have grand ideas—you have a high standard in such matters. I ought at least to bring in a band of music or a company of mountebanks."

"One mountebank is enough, and you do very well. Pray go on, and in another ten minutes I shall begin to laugh."

"I assure you that I am very serious," said Ralph. "You do really ask a great deal."

"I don't know what you mean. I ask nothing!"

"You accept nothing," said Ralph. She coloured, and now suddenly it seemed to her that she guessed his meaning. But why should he speak to her of such things? He hesitated a little, and then he continued. "There is something I should like very much to say to you. It's a question I wish to ask. It seems to me I have a right to ask it, because I have a kind of interest in the answer."

"Ask what you will," Isabel answered gently, "and I will try and satisfy you."

"Well, then, I hope you won't mind my saying that Lord Warburton has told me of something that has passed between you."

Isabel started a little; she sat looking at her open fan. "Very good; I suppose it was natural he should tell you."

"I have his leave to let you know he has done so. He has some hope still," said Ralph.

"Still?"

"He had it a few days ago."

"I don't believe he has any now," said the girl.

"I am very sorry for him, then; he is such a fine fellow."

"Pray, did he ask you to talk to me?"

"No, not that. But he told me because he couldn't help it. We are old friends, and he was greatly disappointed. He sent me a line asking me to come and see him, and I rode over to Lockleigh the day before he and his sister lunched with us. He was very heavy-hearted; he had just got a letter from you."

"Did he show you the letter?" asked Isabel, with momentary loftiness.

"By no means. But he told me it was a neat refusal. I was very sorry for him," Ralph repeated.

For some moments Isabel said nothing: then at last, "Do you know how often he had seen me? Five or six times."

"That's to your glory."

"It's not for that I say it."

"What then do you say it for? Not to prove that poor Warburton's state of mind is superficial because I am pretty sure you don't think that."

Isabel certainly was unable to say that she thought it; but presently she said something else. "If you have not been requested by Lord Warburton to argue with me, then you are doing it disinterestedly—or for the love of argument."

"I have no wish to argue with you at all. I only wish to leave you alone. I am simply greatly interested in your own sentiments."

"I am greatly obliged to you!" cried Isabel, with a laugh.

"Of course you mean that I am meddling in what doesn't concern me. But why shouldn't I speak to you of this matter without annoying you or embarrassing myself? What's the use of being your cousin, if I can't have a few privileges? What is the use of adoring you without the hope of a reward, if I can't have a few compensations? What is the use of being ill and disabled, and restricted to mere spectatorship at the game of life, if I really can't see the show when I have paid so much for my ticket? Tell me this," Ralph went on, while Isabel listened to him with quickened attention: "What had you in your mind when you refused Lord Warburton?"

"What had I in my mind?"

"What was the logic—the view of your situation—that dictated so remarkable an act?"

"I didn't wish to marry him—if that is logic."

"No, that is not logic—and I knew that before. What was it you said to yourself? You certainly said more than that."

Isabel reflected a moment and then she answered this inquiry with a question of her own. "Why do you call it a remarkable act? That is what your mother thinks, too."

"Warburton is such a fine fellow; as a man I think he has hardly a fault. And then, he is what they call here a swell. He has immense possessions, and his wife would be thought a superior being. He unites the intrinsic and the extrinsic advantages."

Isabel watched her cousin while he spoke, as if to see how far he would go. "I refused him because he was too perfect

then. I am not perfect myself, and he is too good for me. Besides, his perfection would irritate me."

"That is ingenious rather than candid," said Ralph. "As a fact, you think nothing in the world too perfect for you."

"Do you think I am so good?"

"No, but you are exacting, all the same, without the excuse of thinking yourself good. Nineteen women out of twenty however, even of the most exacting sort, would have contented themselves with Warburton. Perhaps you don't know he has been run after."

"I don't wish to know. But it seems to me," said Isabel, "that you told me of several faults that he has, one day when I spoke of him to you."

Ralph looked grave. "I hope that what I said then had no weight with you; for they were not faults, the things I spoke of; they were simply peculiarities of his position. If I had known he wished to marry you, I would never have alluded to them. I think I said that as regards that position he was rather a sceptic. It would have been in your power to make him a believer."

"I think not. I don't understand the matter, and I am not conscious of any mission of that sort.—You are evidently disappointed," Isabel added, looking gently but earnestly at her cousin. "You would have liked me to marry Lord Warburton."

"Not in the least. I am absolutely without a wish on the subject. I don't pretend to advise you, and I content myself with watching you—with the deepest interest."

Isabel gave a rather conscious sigh. "I wish I could be as interesting to myself as I am to you!"

"There you are not candid again; you are extremely interesting to yourself. Do you know, however," said Ralph, "that if you have really given Lord Warburton his final answer, I am rather glad it has been what it was. I don't mean I am glad for you, and still less, of course, for him. I am glad for myself."

"Are you thinking of proposing to me?"

"By no means. From the point of view I speak of that would be fatal; I should kill the goose that supplies me with

golden eggs. I use that animal as a symbol of my insane illusions. What I mean is, I shall have the entertainment of seeing what a young lady does who won't marry Lord Warburton."

"That is what your mother counts upon too," said Isabel.

"Ah, there will be plenty of spectators! We shall contemplate the rest of your career. I shall not see all of it, but I shall probably see the most interesting years. Of course, if you were to marry our friend, you would still have a career—a very honourable and brilliant one. But relatively speaking, it would be a little prosaic. It would be definitely marked out in advance; it would be wanting in the unexpected. You know I am extremely fond of the unexpected, and now that you have kept the game in your hands I depend on your giving us some magnificent example of it."

"I don't understand you very well," said Isabel, "but I do so well enough to be able to say that if you look for magnificent examples of anything I shall disappoint you."

"You will do so only by disappointing yourself—and that will go hard with you!"

To this Isabel made no direct reply; there was an amount of truth in it which would bear consideration. At last she said abruptly—

"I don't see what harm there is in my wishing not to tie myself. I don't want to begin life by marrying. There are other things a woman can do."

"There is nothing she can do so well. But you are many-sided."

"If one is two-sided, it is enough," said Isabel.

"You are the most charming of polygons!" Ralph broke out, with a laugh. At a glance from his companion, however, he became grave, and to prove it he went on—"You want to see life, as the young men say."

"I don't think I want to see it as the young men want to see it; but I do want to look about me."

"You want to drain the cup of experience."

"No, I don't wish to touch the cup of experience. It's a poisoned drink! I only want to see for myself."

"You want to see, but not to feel," said Ralph.

"I don't think that if one is a sentient being, one can make the distinction," Isabel returned. "I am a good deal like Henrietta. The other day, when I asked her if she wished to marry, she said—'not till I have seen Europe!' I too don't wish to marry until I have seen Europe."

"You evidently expect that a crowned head will be struck with you."

"No, that would be worse than marrying Lord Warburton. But it is getting very dark," Isabel continued, "and I must go home." She rose from her place, but Ralph sat still a moment, looking at her. As he did not follow her, she stopped, and they remained a while exchanging a gaze, full on either side, but especially on Ralph's, of utterances too vague for words.

"You have answered my question," said Ralph at last. "You have told me what I wanted. I am greatly obliged to you."

"It seems to me I have told you very little."

"You have told me the great thing; that the world interests you and that you want to throw yourself into it."

Isabel's silvery eyes shone for a moment in the darkness. "I never said that."

"I think you meant it. Don't repudiate it; it's so fine!"

"I don't know what you are trying to fasten upon me, for I am not in the least an adventurous spirit. Women are not like men."

Ralph slowly rose from his seat, and they walked together to the gate of the square. "No," he said; "women rarely boast of their courage; men do so with a certain frequency."

"Men have it to boast of!"

"Women have it too; you have a great deal."

"Enough to go home in a cab to Pratt's Hotel; but not more."

Ralph unlocked the gate, and after they had passed out he fastened it.

"We will find your cab," he said; and as they turned towards a neighbouring street in which it seemed that this quest would be fruitful, he asked her again if he might not see her safely to the inn.

"By no means," she answered; "you are very tired; you must go home and go to bed."

The cab was found, and he helped her into it, standing a moment at the door.

"When people forget I am a sick man I am often annoyed," he said. "But it's worse when they remember it!"

CHAPTER XVI

ISABEL had had no hidden motive in wishing her cousin not to take her home; it simply seemed to her that for some days past she had consumed an inordinate quantity of his time, and the independent spirit of the American girl who ends by regarding perpetual assistance as a sort of derogation to her sanity, had made her decide that for these few hours she must suffice to herself. She had moreover a great fondness for intervals of solitude, and since her arrival in England it had been but scantily gratified. It was a luxury she could always command at home, and she had missed it. That evening, however, an incident occurred which—had there been a critic to note it—would have taken all colour from the theory that the love of solitude had caused her to dispense with Ralph's attendance. She was sitting, towards nine o'clock, in the dim illumination of Pratt's Hotel, trying with the aid of two tall candles to lose herself in a volume she had brought from Gardencourt, but succeeding only to the extent of reading other words on the page than those that were printed there—words that Ralph had spoken to her in the afternoon.

Suddenly the well-muffled knuckle of the waiter was applied to the door, which presently admitted him, bearing the card of a visitor. This card, duly considered, offered to Isabel's startled vision the name of Mr. Caspar Goodwood. She let the servant stand before her inquiringly for some instants, without signifying her wishes.

"Shall I show the gentleman up, ma'am?" he asked at last, with a slightly encouraging inflection.

Isabel hesitated still, and while she hesitated she glanced at the mirror.

"He may come in," she said at last; and waited for him with some emotion.

Caspar Goodwood came in and shook hands with her. He said nothing till the servant had left the room again, then he said—

"Why didn't you answer my letter?"

He spoke in a quick, full, slightly peremptory tone—the tone of a man whose questions were usually pointed, and who was capable of much insistence.

Isabel answered him by a question.

"How did you know I was here?"

"Miss Stackpole let me know," said Caspar Goodwood. "She told me that you would probably be at home alone this evening, and would be willing to see me."

"Where did she see you—to tell you that?"

"She didn't see me; she wrote to me."

Isabel was silent; neither of them had seated themselves; they stood there with a certain air of defiance, or at least of contention.

"Henrietta never told me that she was writing to you," Isabel said at last. "This is not kind of her."

"Is it so disagreeable to you to see me?" asked the young man.

"I didn't expect it. I don't like such surprises."

"But you knew I was in town; it was natural we should meet."

"Do you call this meeting? I hoped I should not see you. In so large a place as London it seemed to me very possible."

"Apparently it was disagreeable to you even to write to me," said Mr. Goodwood.

Isabel made no answer to this; the sense of Henrietta Stackpole's treachery, as she momentarily qualified it, was strong within her.

"Henrietta is not delicate!" she exclaimed with a certain bitterness. "It was a great liberty to take."

"I suppose I am not delicate either. The fault is mine as much as hers."

As Isabel looked at him it seemed to her that his jaw had never been more square. This might have displeased her; nevertheless she rejoined inconsequently—

"No, it is not your fault so much as hers. What you have done is very natural."

"It is indeed!" cried Caspar Goodwood, with a voluntary laugh. "And now that I have come, at any rate, may I not stay?"

"You may sit down, certainly."

And Isabel went back to her chair again, while her visitor took the first place that offered, in the manner of a man accustomed to pay little thought to the sort of chair he sat in.

"I have been hoping every day for an answer to my letter," he said. "You might have written me a few lines."

"It was not the trouble of writing that prevented me; I could as easily have written you four pages as one. But my silence was deliberate; I thought it best."

He sat with his eyes fixed on hers while she said this; then he lowered them and attached them to a spot in the carpet, as if he were making a strong effort to say nothing but what he ought to say. He was a strong man in the wrong, and he was acute enough to see that an uncompromising exhibition of his strength would only throw the falsity of his position into relief. Isabel was not incapable of finding it agreeable to have an advantage of position over a person of this quality, and though she was not a girl to flaunt her advantage in his face, she was woman enough to enjoy being able to say "You know you ought not to have written to me yourself!" and to say it with a certain air of triumph.

Caspar Goodwood raised his eyes to hers again; they wore an expression of ardent remonstrance. He had a strong sense of justice, and he was ready any day in the year—over and above this—to argue the question of his rights.

"You said you hoped never to hear from me again; I know that. But I never accepted the prohibition. I promised you that you should hear very soon."

"I did not say that I hoped never to hear from you," said Isabel.

"Not for five years, then; for ten years. It is the same thing."

"Do you find it so? It seems to me there is a great difference. I can imagine that at the end of ten years we might have a very pleasant correspondence. I shall have matured my epistolary style."

Isabel looked away while she spoke these words, for she knew they were of a much less earnest cast than the countenance of her listener. Her eyes, however, at last came back to him, just as he said, very irrelevantly—

"Are you enjoying your visit to your uncle?"

"Very much indeed." She hesitated, and then she broke out with even greater irrelevance, "What good do you expect to get by insisting?"

"The good of not losing you."

"You have no right to talk about losing what is not yours. And even from your own point of view," Isabel added, "you ought to know when to let one alone."

"I displease you very much," said Caspar Goodwood gloomily; not as if to provoke her to compassion for a man conscious of this blighting fact, but as if to set it well before himself, so that he might endeavour to act with his eyes upon it."

"Yes, you displease me very much, and the worst is that it is needless."

Isabel knew that his was not a soft nature, from which pin-pricks would draw blood; and from the first of her acquaintance with him and of her having to defend herself against a certain air that he had of knowing better what was good for her than she knew herself, she had recognised the fact that perfect frankness was her best weapon. To attempt to spare his sensibility or to escape from him edgewise, as one might do from a man who had barred the way less sturdily—this, in dealing with Caspar Goodwood, who would take everything of every sort that one might give him, was wasted agility. It was not that he had not susceptibilities, but his passive surface, as well as his active, was large and firm, and he might always be trusted to dress his wounds himself. In measuring the effect of his suffering, one might always reflect that he had a sound constitution.

"I can't reconcile myself to that," he said.

There was a dangerous liberality about this; for Isabel felt that it was quite open to him to say that he had not always displeased her.

"I can't reconcile myself to it, either, and it is not the state of things that ought to exist between us. If you would only try and banish me from your mind for a few months we should be on good terms again."

"I see. If I should cease to think of you for a few months I should find I could keep it up indefinitely."

"Indefinitely is more than I ask. It is more even than I should like."

"You know that what you ask is impossible," said the young man, taking his adjective for granted in a manner that Isabel found irritating.

"Are you not capable of making an effort?" she demanded. "You are strong for everything else; why shouldn't you be strong for that?"

"Because I am in love with you," said Caspar Goodwood simply. "If one is strong, one loves only the more strongly."

"There is a good deal in that;" and indeed our young lady felt the force of it. "Think of me or not, as you find most possible; only leave me alone."

"Until when?"

"Well, for a year or two."

"Which do you mean? Between one year and two there is a great difference."

"Call it two, then," said Isabel, wondering whether a little cynicism might not be effective.

"And what shall I gain by that?" Mr. Goodwood asked, giving no sign of wincing.

"You will have obliged me greatly."

"But what will be my reward?"

"Do you need a reward for an act of generosity?"

"Yes, when it involves a great sacrifice."

"There is no generosity without sacrifice. Men don't understand such things. If you make this sacrifice I shall admire you greatly."

"I don't care a straw for your admiration. Will you marry me? That is the question."

"Assuredly not, if I feel as I feel at present."

"Then I ask again, what I shall gain?"

"You will gain quite as much as by worrying me to death!"

Caspar Goodwood bent his eyes again and gazed for a while into the crown of his hat. A deep flush overspread his face, and Isabel could perceive that this dart at last had struck home. To see a strong man in pain had something terrible for her, and she immediately felt very sorry for her visitor.

"Why do you make me say such things to you?" she cried in a trembling voice. "I only want to be gentle—to be kind. It is not delightful to me to feel that people care for me, and yet to have to try and reason them out of it. I think others also ought to be considerate; we have each to judge for ourselves. I know you are considerate, as much as you can be; you have good reasons for what you do. But I don't want to marry. I shall probably never marry. I have a perfect right to feel that way, and it is no kindness to a woman to urge her —to persuade her against her will. If I give you pain I can only say I am very sorry. It is not my fault; I can't marry you simply to please you. I won't say that I shall always remain your friend, because when women say that, in these circumstances, it is supposed, I believe, to be a sort of mockery. But try me some day."

Caspar Goodwood, during this speech, had kept his eyes fixed upon the name of his hatter, and it was not until some time after she had ceased speaking that he raised them. When he did so, the sight of a certain rosy, lovely eagerness in Isabel's face threw some confusion into his attempt to analyse what she had said. "I will go home—I will go to-morrow—I will leave you alone," he murmured at last. "Only," he added in a louder tone—"I hate to lose sight of you!"

"Never fear. I will do no harm."

"You will marry some one else," said Caspar Goodwood.

"Do you think that is a generous charge?"

"Why not? Plenty of men will ask you."

"I told you just now that I don't wish to marry, and that I shall probably never do so."

"I know you did; but I don't believe it."

"Thank you very much. You appear to think I am attempting to deceive you; you say very delicate things."

"Why should I not say that? You have given me no promise that you will not marry."

"No, that is all that would be wanting!" cried Isabel, with a bitter laugh.

"You think you won't, but you will," her visitor went on, as if he were preparing himself for the worst.

"Very well, I will then. Have it as you please."

"I don't know, however," said Caspar Goodwood, "that my keeping you in sight would prevent it."

"Don't you indeed? I am, after all, very much afraid of you. Do you think I am so very easily pleased?" she asked suddenly, changing her tone.

"No, I don't; I shall try and console myself with that. But there are a certain number of very clever men in the world; if there were only one, it would be enough. You will be sure to take no one who is not."

"I don't need the aid of a clever man to teach me how to live," said Isabel. "I can find it out for myself."

"To live alone, do you mean? I wish that when you have found that out, you would teach me."

Isabel glanced at him a moment; then, with a quick smile —"Oh, *you* ought to marry!" she said.

Poor Caspar may be pardoned if for an instant this exclamation seemed to him to have the infernal note, and I cannot take upon myself to say that Isabel uttered it in obedience to an impulse strictly celestial. It is a fact, however, that it had always seemed to her that Caspar Goodwood, of all men, ought to enjoy the whole devotion of some tender woman. "God forgive you!" he murmured between his teeth, turning away.

Her exclamation had put her slightly in the wrong, and after a moment she felt the need to right herself. The easiest way to do it was to put her suitor in the wrong. "You do me great injustice—you say what you don't know!" she broke out. "I should not be an easy victim—I have proved it."

"Oh, to me, perfectly."

"I have proved it to others as well." And she paused a moment. "I refused a proposal of marriage last week—what they call a brilliant one."

"I am very glad to hear it," said the young man, gravely.

"It was a proposal that many girls would have accepted; it had everything to recommend it." Isabel had hesitated to tell this story, but now she had begun, the satisfaction of speaking it out and doing herself justice took possession of her. "I was offered a great position and a great fortune—by a person whom I like extremely."

Caspar gazed at her with great interest. "Is he an Englishman?"

"He is an English nobleman," said Isabel.

Mr. Goodwood received this announcement in silence; then at last, he said.

"I am glad he is disappointed."

"Well, then, as you have companions in misfortune, make the best of it."

"I don't call him a companion," said Caspar, grimly.

"Why not—since I declined his offer absolutely?"

"That doesn't make him my companion. Besides, he's an Englishman."

"And pray is not an Englishman a human being?" Isabel inquired.

"Oh, no; he's superhuman."

"You are angry," said the girl. "We have discussed this matter quite enough."

"Oh, yes, I am angry. I plead guilty to that!"

Isabel turned away from him, walked to the open window, and stood a moment looking into the dusky vacancy of the street, where a turbid gaslight alone represented social animation. For some time neither of these young persons spoke; Caspar lingered near the chimney-piece, with his eyes gloomily fixed upon our heroine. She had virtually requested him to withdraw—he knew that; but at the risk of making himself odious to her he kept his ground. She was far too dear to him to be easily forfeited, and he had sailed across the Atlantic to extract some pledge from her. Presently she left the window and stood before him again.

"You do me very little justice," she said—"after my telling you what I told you just now. I am sorry I told you—since it matters so little to you."

"Ah," cried the young man, "if you were thinking of *me* when you did it!" And then he paused, with the fear that she might contradict so happy a thought.

"I was thinking of you a little," said Isabel.

"A little? I don't understand. If the knowledge that I love you had any weight with you at all, it must have had a good deal."

Isabel shook her head impatiently, as if to carry off a blush.

"I have refused a noble gentleman. Make the most of that."

"I thank you, then," said Caspar Goodwood, gravely. "I thank you immensely."

"And now you had better go home."

"May I not see you again?" he asked.

"I think it is better not. You will be sure to talk of this, and you see it leads to nothing."

"I promise you not to say a word that will annoy you."

Isabel reflected a little, and then she said—"I return in a day or two to my uncle's, and I can't propose to you to come there; it would be very inconsistent."

Caspar Goodwood, on his side, debated within himself. "You must do me justice too. I received an invitation to your uncle's more than a week ago, and I declined it."

"From whom was your invitation?" Isabel asked, surprised.

"From Mr. Ralph Touchett, whom I suppose to be your cousin. I declined it because I had not your authorisation to accept it. The suggestion that Mr. Touchett should invite me appeared to have come from Miss Stackpole."

"It certainly did not come from me. Henrietta certainly goes very far," Isabel added.

"Don't be too hard on her—that touches me."

"No; if you declined, that was very proper of you, and I thank you for it." And Isabel gave a little shudder of dismay at the thought that Lord Warburton and Mr. Goodwood might have met at Gardencourt: it would have been so awkward for Lord Warburton!

"When you leave your uncle, where are you going?" Caspar asked.

"I shall go abroad with my aunt—to Florence and other places."

The serenity of this announcement struck a chill to the young man's heart; he seemed to see her whirled away into circles from which he was inexorably excluded. Nevertheless he went on quickly with his questions. "And when shall you come back to America?"

"Perhaps not for a long time; I am very happy here."

"Do you mean to give up your country?"

"Don't be an infant."

"Well, you will be out of my sight indeed!" said Caspar Goodwood.

"I don't know," she answered, rather grandly. "The world strikes me as small."

"It is too large for me!" Caspar exclaimed, with a simplicity which our young lady might have found touching if her face had not been set against concessions.

This attitude was part of a system, a theory, that she had lately embraced, and to be thorough she said after a moment —"Don't think me unkind if I say that it's just that—being out of your sight—that I like. If you were in the same place as I, I should feel as if you were watching me, and I don't like that. I like my liberty too much. If there is a thing in the world that I am fond of," Isabel went on, with a slight recurrence of the grandeur that had shown itself a moment before—"it is my personal independence."

But whatever there was of grandeur in this speech moved Caspar Goodwood's admiration; there was nothing that displeased him in the sort of feeling it expressed. This feeling not only did no violence to his way of looking at the girl he wished to make his wife, but seemed a grace the more in so ardent a spirit. To his mind she had always had wings, and this was but the flutter of those stainless pinions. He was not afraid of having a wife with a certain largeness of movement; he was a man of long steps himself. Isabel's words, if they had been meant to shock him, failed of the mark, and only made him smile with the sense that here was common ground. "Who would wish less to curtail your liberty than I?" he asked. "What can give me greater pleasure than to see you perfectly independent—doing whatever you like? It is to make you independent that I want to marry you."

"That's a beautiful sophism," said the girl, with a smile more beautiful still.

"An unmarried woman—a girl of your age—is not independent. There are all sorts of things she can't do. She is hampered at every step."

"That's as she looks at the question," Isabel answered, with much spirit. "I am not in my first youth—I can do what I choose—I belong quite to the independent class. I have

neither father nor mother; I am poor; I am of a serious disposition, and not pretty. I therefore am not bound to be timid and conventional; indeed I can't afford such luxuries. Besides, I try to judge things for myself; to judge wrong, I think, is more honourable than not to judge at all. I don't wish to be a mere sheep in the flock; I wish to choose my fate and know something of human affairs beyond what other people think it compatible with propriety to tell me." She paused a moment, but not long enough for her companion to reply. He was apparently on the point of doing so, when she went on—"Let me say this to you, Mr. Goodwood. You are so kind as to speak of being afraid of my marrying. If you should hear a rumour that I am on the point of doing so—girls are liable to have such things said about them—remember what I have told you about my love of liberty, and venture to doubt it."

There was something almost passionately positive in the tone in which Isabel gave him this advice, and he saw a shining candour in her eyes which helped him to believe her. On the whole he felt reassured, and you might have perceived it by the manner in which he said, quite eagerly—"You want simply to travel for two years? I am quite willing to wait two years, and you may do what you like in the interval. If that is all you want, pray say so. I don't want you to be conventional; do I strike you as conventional myself? Do you want to improve your mind? Your mind is quite good enough for me; but if it interests you to wander about a while and see different countries, I shall be delighted to help you, in any way in my power."

"You are very generous; that is nothing new to me. The best way to help me will be to put as many hundred miles of sea between us as possible."

"One would think you were going to commit a crime!" said Caspar Goodwood.

"Perhaps I am. I wish to be free even to do that, if the fancy takes me."

"Well then," he said, slowly, "I will go home." And he put out his hand, trying to look contented and confident.

Isabel's confidence in him, however, was greater than any he could feel in her. Not that he thought her capable of

committing a crime; but, turn it over as he would, there was something ominous in the way she reserved her option. As Isabel took his hand, she felt a great respect for him; she knew how much he cared for her, and she thought him magnanimous. They stood so for a moment, looking at each other, united by a handclasp which was not merely passive on her side. "That's right," she said, very kindly, almost tenderly. "You will lose nothing by being a reasonable man."

"But I will come back, wherever you are, two years hence," he returned, with characteristic grimness.

We have seen that our young lady was inconsequent, and at this she suddenly changed her note. "Ah, remember, I promise nothing—absolutely nothing!" Then more softly, as if to help him to leave her, she added—"And remember, too, that I shall not be an easy victim!"

"You will get very sick of your independence."

"Perhaps I shall; it is even very probable. When that day comes I shall be very glad to see you."

She had laid her hand on the knob of the door that led into her room, and she waited a moment to see whether her visitor would not take his departure. But he appeared unable to move; there was still an immense unwillingness in his attitude—a deep remonstrance in his eyes.

"I must leave you now," said Isabel; and she opened the door, and passed into the other room.

This apartment was dark, but the darkness was tempered by a vague radiance sent up through the window from the court of the hotel, and Isabel could make out the masses of the furniture, the dim shining of the mirror, and the looming of the big four-posted bed. She stood still a moment, listening; and at last she heard Caspar Goodwood walk out of the sitting-room and close the door behind him. She stood still a moment longer, and then, by an irresistible impulse, she dropped on her knees before her bed, and hid her face in her arms.

CHAPTER XVII

SHE was not praying; she was trembling—trembling all over. She was an excitable creature, and now she was much excited; but she wished to resist her excitement, and the attitude of prayer, which she kept for some time, seemed to help her to be still. She was extremely glad Caspar Goodwood was gone; there was something exhilarating in having got rid of him. As Isabel became conscious of this feeling she bowed her head a little lower; the feeling was there, throbbing in her heart; it was a part of her emotion; but it was a thing to be ashamed of—it was profane and out of place. It was not for some ten minutes that she rose from her knees, and when she came back to the sitting-room she was still trembling a little. Her agitation had two causes; part of it was to be accounted for by her long discussion with Mr. Goodwood, but it might be feared that the rest was simply the enjoyment she found in the exercise of her power. She sat down in the same chair again, and took up her book, but without going through the form of opening the volume. She leaned back, with that low, soft, aspiring murmur with which she often expressed her gladness in accidents of which the brighter side was not superficially obvious, and gave herself up to the satisfaction of having refused two ardent suitors within a fortnight.

That love of liberty of which she had given Caspar Goodwood so bold a sketch was as yet almost exclusively theoretic; she had not been able to indulge it on a large scale. But it seemed to her that she had done something; she had tasted of the delight, if not of battle, at least of victory; she had done what she preferred. In the midst of this agreeable sensation the image of Mr. Goodwood taking his sad walk homeward through the dingy town presented itself with a certain reproachful force; so that, as at the same moment the door of the room was opened, she rose quickly with an

apprehension that he had come back. But it was only Henrietta Stackpole returning from her dinner.

Miss Stackpole immediately saw that something had happened to Isabel, and indeed the discovery demanded no great penetration. Henrietta went straight up to her friend, who received her without a greeting. Isabel's elation in having sent Caspar Goodwood back to America pre-supposed her being glad that he had come to see her; but at the same time she perfectly remembered that Henrietta had had no right to set a trap for her.

"Has he been here, dear?" Miss Stackpole inquired, softly.

Isabel turned away, and for some moments answered nothing.

"You acted very wrongly," she said at last.

"I acted for the best, dear. I only hope you acted as well."

"You are not the judge. I can't trust you," said Isabel.

This declaration was unflattering, but Henrietta was much too unselfish to heed the charge it conveyed; she cared only for what it intimated with regard to her friend.

"Isabel Archer," she declared, with equal abruptness and solemnity, "if you marry one of these people, I will never speak to you again!"

"Before making so terrible a threat, you had better wait till I am asked," Isabel replied. Never having said a word to Miss Stackpole about Lord Warburton's overtures, she had now no impulse whatever to justify herself to Henrietta by telling her that she had refused that nobleman.

"Oh, you'll be asked quick enough, once you get off on the continent. Annie Climber was asked three times in Italy—poor plain little Annie."

"Well, if Annie Climber was not captured, why should I be?"

"I don't believe Annie was pressed; but you'll be."

"That's a flattering conviction," said Isabel, with a laugh.

"I don't flatter you, Isabel, I tell you the truth!" cried her friend. "I hope you don't mean to tell me that you didn't give Mr. Goodwood some hope."

"I don't see why I should tell you anything; as I said to you just now, I can't trust you. But since you are so much

interested in Mr. Goodwood, I won't conceal from you that he returns immediately to America."

"You don't mean to say you have sent him off?" Henrietta broke out in dismay.

"I asked him to leave me alone; and I ask you the same, Henrietta."

Miss Stackpole stood there with expanded eyes, and then she went to the mirror over the chimney-piece and took off her bonnet.

"I hope you have enjoyed your dinner," Isabel remarked lightly, as she did so.

But Miss Stackpole was not to be diverted by frivolous propositions, nor bribed by the offer of autobiographic opportunities.

"Do you know where you are going, Isabel Archer?"

"Just now I am going to bed," said Isabel, with persistent frivolity.

"Do you know where you are drifting?" Henrietta went on holding out her bonnet delicately.

"No, I haven't the least idea, and I find it very pleasant not to know. A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see—that's my idea of happiness."

"Mr. Goodwood certainly didn't teach you to say such things as that—like the heroine of an immoral novel," said Miss Stackpole. "You are drifting to some great mistake."

Isabel was irritated by her friend's interference, but even in the midst of her irritation she tried to think what truth this declaration could represent. She could think of nothing that diverted her from saying—"You must be very fond of me, Henrietta, to be willing to be so disagreeable to me."

"I love you, Isabel," said Miss Stackpole, with feeling.

"Well, if you love me, let me alone. I asked that of Mr. Goodwood, and I must also ask it of you."

"Take care you are not let alone too much."

"That is what Mr. Goodwood said to me. I told him I must take the risks."

"You are a creature of risks—you make me shudder!" cried Henrietta. "When does Mr. Goodwood return to America?"

"I don't know—he didn't tell me."

"Perhaps you didn't inquire," said Henrietta, with the note of righteous irony.

"I gave him too little satisfaction to have the right to ask questions of him."

This assertion seemed to Miss Stackpole for a moment to bid defiance to comment; but at last she exclaimed—"Well, Isabel, if I didn't know you, I might think you were heartless!"

"Take care," said Isabel; "you are spoiling me."

"I am afraid I have done that already. I hope, at least," Miss Stackpole added, "that he may cross with Annie Climber!"

Isabel learned from her the next morning that she had determined not to return to Gardencourt (where old Mr. Touchett had promised her a renewed welcome), but to await in London the arrival of the invitation that Mr. Bantling had promised her from his sister, Lady Pensil. Miss Stackpole related very freely her conversation with Ralph Touchett's sociable friend, and declared to Isabel that she really believed she had now got hold of something that would lead to something. On the receipt of Lady Pensil's letter—Mr. Bantling had virtually guaranteed the arrival of this document—she would immediately depart for Bedfordshire, and if Isabel cared to look out for her impressions in the *Interviewer,* she would certainly find them. Henrietta was evidently going to see something of the inner life this time.

"Do you know where you are drifting, Henrietta Stackpole?" Isabel asked, imitating the tone in which her friend had spoken the night before.

"I am drifting to a big position—that of queen of American journalism. If my next letter isn't copied all over the West, I'll swallow my pen-wiper!"

She had arranged with her friend Miss Annie Climber, the young lady of the continental offers, that they should go together to make those purchases which were to constitute Miss Climber's farewell to a hemisphere in which she at least had been appreciated; and she presently repaired to Jermyn Street to pick up her companion. Shortly after her

departure Ralph Touchett was announced, and as soon as he came in Isabel saw that he had something on his mind. He very soon took his cousin into his confidence. He had received a telegram from his mother, telling him that his father had had a sharp attack of his old malady, that she was much alarmed, and that she begged Ralph would instantly return to Gardencourt. On this occasion, at least, Mrs. Touchett's devotion to the electric wire had nothing incongruous.

"I have judged it best to see the great doctor, Sir Matthew Hope, first," Ralph said; "by great good luck he's in town. He is to see me at half-past twelve, and I shall make sure of his coming down to Gardencourt—which he will do the more readily as he has already seen my father several times, both there and in London. There is an express at two-forty-five, which I shall take, and you will come back with me, or remain here a few days longer, exactly as you prefer."

"I will go with you!" Isabel exclaimed. "I don't suppose I can be of any use to my uncle, but if he is ill I should like to be near him."

"I think you like him," said Ralph, with a certain shy pleasure in his eye. "You appreciate him, which all the world hasn't done. The quality is too fine."

"I think I love him," said Isabel, simply.

"That's very well. After his son, he is your greatest admirer."

Isabel welcomed this assurance, but she gave secretly a little sigh of relief at the thought that Mr. Touchett was one of those admirers who could not propose to marry her. This, however, was not what she said; she went on to inform Ralph that there were other reasons why she should not remain in London. She was tired of it and wished to leave it; and then Henrietta was going away—going to stay in Bedfordshire."

"In Bedfordshire?" Ralph exclaimed, with surprise.

"With Lady Pensil, the sister of Mr. Bantling, who has answered for an invitation."

Ralph was feeling anxious, but at this he broke into a laugh. Suddenly, however, he looked grave again. "Bant-

ling is a man of courage. But if the invitation should get lost on the way?"

"I thought the British post-office was impeccable."

"The good Homer sometimes nods," said Ralph. "However," he went on, more brightly, "the good Bantling never does, and, whatever happens, he will take care of Henrietta."

Ralph went to keep his appointment with Sir Matthew Hope, and Isabel made her arrangements for quitting Pratt's Hotel. Her uncle's danger touched her nearly, and while she stood before her open trunk, looking about her vaguely for what she should put into it, the tears suddenly rushed into her eyes. It was perhaps for this reason that when Ralph came back at two o'clock to take her to the station she was not yet ready.

He found Miss Stackpole, however, in the sitting-room, where she had just risen from the lunch-table, and this lady immediately expressed her regret at his father's illness.

"He is a grand old man," she said; "he is faithful to the last. If it is really to be the last—excuse my alluding to it, but you must often have thought of the possibility—I am sorry that I shall not be at Gardencourt."

"You will amuse yourself much more in Bedfordshire."

"I shall be sorry to amuse myself at such a time," said Henrietta, with much propriety. But she immediately added—"I should like so to commemorate the closing scene."

"My father may live a long time," said Ralph, simply. Then, adverting to topics more cheerful, he interrogated Miss Stackpole as to her own future.

Now that Ralph was in trouble, she addressed him in a tone of larger allowance, and told him that she was much indebted to him for having made her acquainted with Mr. Bantling. "He has told me just the things I want to know," she said; "all the society-items and all about the royal family. I can't make out that what he tells me about the royal family is much to their credit; but he says that's only my peculiar way of looking at it. Well, all I want is that he should give me the facts; I can put them together quick enough, once I've got them." And she added that Mr.

Bantling had been so good as to promise to come and take her out in the afternoon.

"To take you where?" Ralph ventured to inquire.

"To Buckingham Palace. He is going to show me over it, so that I may get some idea how they live."

"Ah," said Ralph, "we leave you in good hands. The first thing we shall hear is that you are invited to Windsor Castle."

"If they ask me, I shall certainly go. Once I get started I am not afraid. But for all that," Henrietta added in a moment, "I am not satisfied; I am not satisfied about Isabel."

"What is her last misdemeanour?"

"Well, I have told you before, and I suppose there is no harm in my going on, I always finish a subject that I take up. Mr. Goodwood was here last night."

Ralph opened his eyes; he even blushed a little—his blush being the sign of an emotion somewhat acute. He remembered that Isabel, in separating from him in Winchester Square, had repudiated his suggestion that her motive in doing so was the expectation of a visitor at Pratt's Hotel, and it was a novel sensation to him to have to suspect her of duplicity. On the other hand, he quickly said to himself, what concern was it of his that she should have made an appointment with a lover? Had it not been thought graceful in every age that young ladies should make a mystery of such appointments? Ralph made Miss Stackpole a diplomatic answer. "I should have thought that, with the views you expressed to me the other day, that would satisfy you perfectly."

"That he should come to see her? That was very well, as far as it went. It was a little plot of mine; I let him know that we were in London, and when it had been arranged that I should spend the evening out, I just sent him a word—a word to the wise. I hoped he would find her alone; I won't pretend I didn't hope that you would be out of the way. He came to see her; but he might as well have stayed away."

"Isabel was cruel?" Ralph inquired, smiling, and relieved at learning that his cousin had not deceived him.

"I don't exactly know what passed between them. But she gave him no satisfaction—she sent him back to America."

"Poor Mr. Goodwood!" Ralph exclaimed.

"Her only idea seems to be to get rid of him," Henrietta went on.

"Poor Mr. Goodwood!" repeated Ralph. The exclamation, it must be confessed, was somewhat mechanical. It failed exactly to express his thoughts, which were taking another line.

"You don't say that as if you felt it; I don't believe you care."

"Ah," said Ralph, "you must remember that I don't know this interesting young man—that I have never seen him."

"Well, I shall see him, and I shall tell him not to give up. If I didn't believe Isabel would come round," said Miss Stackpole—"well, I'd give her up myself!"

CHAPTER XVIII

IT had occurred to Ralph that under the circumstances Isabel's parting with Miss Stackpole might be of a slightly embarrassed nature, and he went down to the door of the hotel in advance of his cousin, who after a slight delay followed, with the traces of an unaccepted remonstrance, as he thought, in her eye. The two made the journey to Gardencourt in almost unbroken silence, and the servant who met them at the station had no better news to give them of Mr. Touchett—a fact which caused Ralph to congratulate himself afresh on Sir Matthew Hope's having promised to come down in the five o'clock train and spend the night. Mrs. Touchett, he learned, on reaching home, had been constantly with the old man, and was with him at that moment; and this fact made Ralph say to himself that, after all, what his mother wanted was simply opportunity. The finest natures were those that shone on large occasions. Isabel went to her own room, noting, throughout the house, that perceptible hush which precedes a crisis. At the end of an hour, however, she came down-stairs in search of her aunt, whom she wished to ask about Mr. Touchett. She went into the library, but Mrs. Touchett was not there, and as the weather, which had been damp and chill, was now altogether spoiled, it was not probable that she had gone for her usual walk in the grounds. Isabel was on the point of ringing to send an inquiry to her room, when her attention was taken by an unexpected sound—the sound of low music proceeding apparently from the drawing-room. She knew that her aunt never touched the piano, and the musician was therefore probably Ralph, who played for his own amusement. That he should have resorted to this recreation at the present time, indicated apparently that his anxiety about his father had been relieved; so that Isabel took her way to the drawing-room with much alertness. The drawing-room

at Gardencourt was an apartment of great distances, and as the piano was placed at the end of it furthest removed from the door at which Isabel entered her arrival was not noticed by the person seated before the instrument. This person was neither Ralph nor his mother; it was a lady whom Isabel immediately saw to be a stranger to herself, although her back was presented to the door. This back—an ample and well-dressed one—Isabel contemplated for some moments in surprise. The lady was of course a visitor who had arrived during her absence, and who had not been mentioned by either of the servants—one of them her aunt's maid—of whom she had had speech since her return. Isabel had already learned, however, that the British domestic is not effusive, and she was particularly conscious of having been treated with dryness by her aunt's maid, whose offered assistance the young lady from Albany—versed, as young ladies are in Albany, in the very metaphysics of the toilet—had perhaps made too light of. The arrival of a visitor was far from disagreeable to Isabel; she had not yet divested herself of a youthful impression that each new acquaintance would exert some momentous influence upon her life. By the time she had made these reflections she became aware that the lady at the piano played remarkably well. She was playing something of Beethoven's—Isabel knew not what, but she recognised Beethoven—and she touched the piano softly and discreetly, but with evident skill. Her touch was that of an artist; Isabel sat down noiselessly on the nearest chair and waited till the end of the piece. When it was finished she felt a strong desire to thank the player, and rose from her seat to do so, while at the same time the lady at the piano turned quickly round, as if she had become aware of her presence.

"That is very beautiful, and your playing makes it more beautiful still," said Isabel, with all the young radiance with which she usually uttered a truthful rapture.

"You don't think I disturbed Mr. Touchett, then?" the musician answered, as sweetly as this compliment deserved. "The house is so large, and his room so far away, that I thought I might venture—especially as I played just—just *du bout des doigts.*"

"She is a Frenchwoman," Isabel said to herself; "she says that as if she were French." And this supposition made the stranger more interesting to our speculative heroine. "I hope my uncle is doing well," Isabel added. "I should think that to hear such lovely music as that would really make him feel better."

The lady gave a discriminating smile.

"I am afraid there are moments in life when even Beethoven has nothing to say to us. We must admit, however, that they are our worst moments."

"I am not in that state now," said Isabel. "On the contrary, I should be so glad if you would play something more."

"If it will give you pleasure—most willingly." And this obliging person took her place again, and struck a few chords, while Isabel sat down nearer the instrument. Suddenly the stranger stopped, with her hands on the keys, half-turning and looking over her shoulder at the girl. She was forty years old, and she was not pretty; but she had a delightful expression. "Excuse me," she said; "but are you the niece—the young American?"

"I am my aunt's niece," said Isabel, with *naïveté*.

The lady at the piano sat still a moment longer, looking over her shoulder with her charming smile.

"That's very well," she said, "we are compatriots."

And then she began to play.

"Ah, then she is not French," Isabel murmured; and as the opposite supposition had made her interesting, it might have seemed that this revelation would have diminished her effectiveness. But such was not the fact; for Isabel, as she listened to the music, found much stimulus to conjecture in the fact that an American should so strongly resemble a foreign woman.

Her companion played in the same manner as before, softly and solemnly, and while she played the shadows deepened in the room. The autumn twilight gathered in, and from her place Isabel could see the rain, which had now begun in earnest, washing the cold-looking lawn, and the wind shaking the great trees. At last, when the music had ceased, the lady got up, and, coming to her audi-

tor, smiling, before Isabel had time to thank her again, said—

"I am very glad you have come back; I have heard a great deal about you."

Isabel thought her a very attractive person; but she nevertheless said, with a certain abruptness, in answer to this speech—

"From whom have you heard about me?"

The stranger hesitated a single moment, and then—

"From your uncle," she answered. "I have been here three days, and the first day he let me come and pay him a visit in his room. Then he talked constantly of you."

"As you didn't know me, that must have bored you."

"It made me want to know you. All the more that since then—your aunt being so much with Mr. Touchett—I have been quite alone, and have got rather tired of my own society. I have not chosen a good moment for my visit."

A servant had come in with lamps, and was presently followed by another, bearing the tea-tray. On the appearance of this repast Mrs. Touchett had apparently been notified, for she now arrived and addressed herself to the tea-pot. Her greeting to her niece did not differ materially from her manner of raising the lid of this receptacle in order to glance at the contents: in neither act was it becoming to make a show of avidity. Questioned about her husband, she was unable to say that he was better; but the local doctor was with him, and much light was expected from this gentleman's consultation with Sir Matthew Hope.

"I suppose you two ladies have made acquaintance?" she said. "If you have not, I recommend you to do so; for so long as we continue—Ralph and I—to cluster about Mr. Touchett's bed, you are not likely to have much society but each other."

"I know nothing about you but that you are a great musician," Isabel said to the visitor.

"There is a good deal more than that to know," Mrs. Touchett affirmed, in her little dry tone.

"A very little of it, I am sure, will content Miss Archer!" the lady exclaimed, with a light laugh. "I am an old friend

of your aunt's—I have lived much in Florence—I am Madame Merle."

She made this last announcement as if she were referring to a person of tolerably distinct identity.

For Isabel, however, it represented but little; she could only continue to feel that Madame Merle had a charming manner.

"She is not a foreigner, in spite of her name," said Mrs. Touchett. "She was born—I always forget where you were born."

"It is hardly worth while I should tell you, then."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. Touchett who rarely missed a logical point; "if I remembered, your telling me would be quite superfluous."

Madame Merle glanced at Isabel with a fine, frank smile. "I was born under the shadow of the national banner."

"She is too fond of mystery," said Mrs. Touchett; "that is her great fault."

"Ah," exclaimed Madame Merle, "I have great faults, but I don't think that is one of them; it certainly is not the greatest. I came into the world in the Brooklyn navy-yard. My father was a high officer in the United States navy, and had a post—a post of responsibility—in that establishment at the time. I suppose I ought to love the sea, but I hate it. That's why I don't return to America. I love the land; the great thing is to love something."

Isabel, as a dispassionate witness, had not been struck with the force of Mrs. Touchett's characterisation of her visitor, who had an expressive, communicative, responsive face, by no means of the sort which, to Isabel's mind, suggested a secretive disposition. It was a face that told of a rich nature and of quick and liberal impulses, and though it had no regular beauty was in the highest degree agreeable to contemplate.

Madame Merle was a tall, fair, plump woman; everything in her person was round and replete, though without those accumulations which minister to indolence. Her features were thick, but there was a graceful harmony among them, and her complexion had a healthy clearness. She had a small grey eye, with a great deal of light in it—an eye

incapable of dulness, and, according to some people, incapable of tears; and a wide, firm mouth, which, when she smiled, drew itself upward to the left side, in a manner that most people thought very odd, some very affected, and a few very graceful. Isabel inclined to range herself in the last category. Madame Merle had thick, fair hair, which was arranged with picturesque simplicity, and a large white hand, of a perfect shape—a shape so perfect that its owner, preferring to leave it unadorned, wore no rings. Isabel had taken her at first, as we have seen, for a Frenchwoman; but extended observation led her to say to herself that Madame Merle might be a German—a German of rank, a countess, a princess. Isabel would never have supposed that she had been born in Brooklyn—though she could doubtless not have justified her assumption that the air of distinction, possessed by Madame Merle in so eminent a degree, was inconsistent with such a birth. It was true that the national banner had floated immediately over the spot of the lady's nativity, and the breezy freedom of the stars and stripes might have shed an influence upon the attitude which she then and there took towards life. And yet Madame Merle had evidently nothing of the fluttered, flapping quality of a morsel of bunting in the wind; her deportment expressed the repose and confidence which come from a large experience. Experience, however, had not quenched her youth; it had simply made her sympathetic and supple. She was in a word a woman of ardent impulses, kept in admirable order. What an ideal combination! thought Isabel.

She made these reflections while the three ladies sat at their tea, but this ceremony was interrupted before long by the arrival of the great doctor from London, who had been immediately ushered into the drawing-room. Mrs. Touchett took him off to the library, to confer with him in private; and then Madame Merle and Isabel parted, to meet again at dinner. The idea of seeing more of this interesting woman did much to mitigate Isabel's perception of the melancholy that now hung over Gardencourt.

When she came into the drawing-room before dinner she found the place empty; but in the course of a moment Ralph

arrived. His anxiety about his father had been lightened; Sir Matthew Hope's view of his condition was less sombre than Ralph's had been. The doctor recommended that the nurse alone should remain with the old man for the next three or four hours; so that Ralph, his mother, and the great physician himself, were free to dine at table. Mrs. Touchett and Sir Matthew came in; Madame Merle was the last to appear.

Before she came, Isabel spoke of her to Ralph, who was standing before the fireplace.

"Pray who is Madame Merle?"

"The cleverest woman I know, not excepting yourself," said Ralph.

"I thought she seemed very pleasant."

"I was sure you would think her pleasant," said Ralph.

"Is that why you invited her?"

"I didn't invite her, and when we came back from London I didn't know she was here. No one invited her. She is a friend of my mother's, and just after you and I went to town, my mother got a note from her. She had arrived in England (she usually lives abroad, though she has first and last spent a good deal of time here), and she asked leave to come down for a few days. Madame Merle is a woman who can make such proposals with perfect confidence; she is so welcome wherever she goes. And with my mother there could be no question of hesitating; she is the one person in the world whom my mother very much admires. If she were not herself (which she after all much prefers), she would like to be Madame Merle. It would, indeed, be a great change."

"Well, she is very charming," said Isabel. "And she plays beautifully."

"She does everything beautifully. She is complete."

Isabel looked at her cousin a moment. "You don't like her."

"On the contrary, I was once in love with her."

"And she didn't care for you, and that's why you don't like her."

"How can we have discussed such things? M. Merle was then living."

"Is he dead now?"

"So she says."

"Don't you believe her?"

"Yes, because the statement agrees with the probabilities. The husband of Madame Merle would be likely to pass away."

Isabel gazed at her cousin again. "I don't know what you mean. You mean something—that you don't mean. What was M. Merle?"

"The husband of Madame."

"You are very odious. Has she any children?"

"Not the least little child—fortunately."

"Fortunately?"

"I mean fortunately for the child; she would be sure to spoil it."

Isabel was apparently on the point of assuring her cousin for the third time that he was odious; but the discussion was interrupted by the arrival of the lady who was the topic of it. She came rustling in quickly, apologising for being late, fastening a bracelet, dressed in dark blue satin, which exposed a white bosom that was ineffectually covered by a curious silver necklace. Ralph offered her his arm with the exaggerated alertness of a man who was no longer a lover.

Even if this had still been his condition, however, Ralph had other things to think about. The great doctor spent the night at Gardencourt, and returning to London on the morrow, after another consultation with Mr. Touchett's own medical adviser, concurred in Ralph's desire that he should see the patient again on the day following. On the day following Sir Matthew Hope reappeared at Gardencourt, and on this occasion took a less encouraging view of the old man, who had grown worse in the twenty-four hours. His feebleness was extreme, and to his son, who constantly sat by his bedside, it often seemed that his end was at hand. The local doctor, who was a very sagacious man, and in whom Ralph had secretly more confidence than in his distinguished colleague, was constantly in attendance, and Sir Matthew Hope returned several times to Gardencourt. Mr. Touchett was much of the time unconscious; he slept

a great deal; he rarely spoke. Isabel had a great desire to be useful to him, and was allowed to watch with him several times when his other attendants (of whom Mrs. Touchett was not the least regular) went to take rest. He never seemed to know her, and she always said to herself—"Suppose he should die while I am sitting here;" an idea which excited her and kept her awake. Once he opened his eyes for a while and fixed them upon her intelligently, but when she went to him, hoping he would recognise her, he closed them and relapsed into unconsciousness. The day after this, however, he revived for a longer time; but on this occasion Ralph was with him alone. The old man began to talk, much to his son's satisfaction, who assured him that they should presently have him sitting up.

"No, my boy," said Mr. Touchett, "not unless you bury me in a sitting posture, as some of the ancients—was it the ancients?—used to do.

"Ah, daddy, don't talk about that," Ralph murmured. "You must not deny that you are getting better."

"There will be no need of my denying it if you don't say so," the old man answered. "Why should we prevaricate, just at the last? We never prevaricated before. I have got to die some time, and it's better to die when one is sick than when one is well. I am very sick—as sick as I shall ever be. I hope you don't want to prove that I shall ever be worse than this? That would be too bad. You don't? Well then."

Having made this excellent point he became quiet, but the next time that Ralph was with him he again addressed himself to conversation. The nurse had gone to her supper and Ralph was alone with him, having just relieved Mrs. Touchett, who had been on guard since dinner. The room was lighted only by the flickering fire, which of late had become necessary, and Ralph's tall shadow was projected upon the wall and ceiling, with an outline constantly varying but always grotesque.

"Who is that with me—is it my son?" the old man asked.

"Yes, it's your son, daddy."

"And is there no one else?"

"No one else."

Mr. Touchett said nothing for a while; and then, "I want to talk a little," he went on.

"Won't it tire you?" Ralph inquired.

"It won't matter if it does. I shall have a long rest. I want to talk about you."

Ralph had drawn nearer to the bed; he sat leaning forward, with his hand on his father's. "You had better select a brighter topic," he said.

"You were always bright; I used to be proud of your brightness. I should like so much to think that you would do something."

"If you leave us," said Ralph, "I shall do nothing but miss you."

"That is just what I don't want; it's what I want to talk about. You must get a new interest."

"I don't want a new interest, daddy. I have more old ones than I know what to do with."

The old man lay there looking at his son; his face was the face of the dying, but his eyes were the eyes of Daniel Touchett. He seemed to be reckoning over Ralph's interests.

"Of course you have got your mother," he said at last. "You will take care of her."

"My mother will always take care of herself," Ralph answered.

"Well," said his father, "perhaps as she grows older she will need a little help."

"I shall not see that. She will outlive me."

"Very likely she will; but that's no reason—" Mr. Touchett let his phrase die away in a helpless but not exactly querulous sigh, and remained silent again.

"Don't trouble yourself about us," said his son. "My mother and I get on very well together, you know."

"You get on by always being apart; that's not natural."

"If you leave us, we shall probably see more of each other."

"Well," the old man observed, with wandering irrelevance, "it cannot be said that my death will make much difference in your mother's life."

"It will probably make more than you think."

"Well, she'll have more money," said Mr. Touchett. "I have left her a good wife's portion, just as if she had been a good wife."

"She has been one, daddy, according to her own theory. She has never troubled you."

"Ah, some troubles are pleasant," Mr. Touchett murmured. "Those you have given me, for instance. But your mother has been less—less—what shall I call it? less out of the way since I have been ill. I presume she knows I have noticed it."

"I shall certainly tell her so; I am so glad you mention it."

"It won't make any difference to her; she doesn't do it to please me. She does it to please—to please—" And he lay a while, trying to think why she did it. "She does it to please herself. But that is not what I want to talk about," he added. "It's about you. You will be very well off."

"Yes," said Ralph, "I know that. But I hope you have not forgotten the talk we had a year ago—when I told you exactly what money I should need and begged you to make some good use of the rest."

"Yes, yes, I remember. I made a new will—in a few days. I suppose it was the first time such a thing had happened—a young man trying to get a will made against him."

"It is not against me," said Ralph. "It would be against me to have a large property to take care of. It is impossible for a man in my state of health to spend much money, and enough is as good as a feast."

"Well, you will have enough—and something over. There will be more than enough for one—there will be enough for two."

"That's too much," said Ralph.

"Ah, don't say that. The best thing you can do, when I am gone, will be to marry."

Ralph had foreseen what his father was coming to, and this suggestion was by no means novel. It had long been Mr. Touchett's most ingenious way of expressing the optimistic view of his son's health. Ralph had usually treated it humorously; but present circumstances made the humorous tone impossible. He simply fell back in his chair and returned his father's appealing gaze in silence.

"If I, with a wife who hasn't been very fond of me, have had a very happy life," said the old man, carrying his ingenuity further still, "what a life might you not have, if you should marry a person different from Mrs. Touchett. There are more different from her than there are like her."

Ralph still said nothing; and after a pause his father asked softly—"What do you think of your cousin?"

At this Ralph started, meeting the question with a rather fixed smile. "Do I understand you to propose that I should marry Isabel?"

"Well, that's what it comes to in the end. Don't you like her?"

"Yes, very much." And Ralph got up from his chair and wandered over to the fire. He stood before it an instant and then he stooped and stirred it, mechanically. "I like Isabel very much," he repeated.

"Well," said his father, "I know she likes you. She told me so."

"Did she remark that she would like to marry me?"

"No, but she can't have anything against you. And she is the most charming young lady I have ever seen. And she would be good to you. I have thought a great deal about it."

"So have I," said Ralph, coming back to the bedside again. "I don't mind telling you that."

"You *are* in love with her, then? I should think you would be. It's as if she came over on purpose."

"No, I am not in love with her; but I should be if—if certain things were different."

"Ah, things are always different from what they might be," said the old man. "If you wait for them to change, you will never do anything. I don't know whether you know," he went on; "but I suppose there is no harm in my alluding to it in such an hour as this: there was some one wanted to marry Isabel the other day, and she wouldn't have him."

"I know she refused Lord Warburton; he told me himself."

"Well, that proves that there is a chance for somebody else."

"Somebody else took his chance the other day in London—and got nothing by it."

"Was it you?" Mr. Touchett asked, eagerly.

"No, it was an older friend; a poor gentleman who came over from America to see about it."

"Well, I am sorry for him. But it only proves what I say —that the way is open to you."

"If it is, dear father, it is all the greater pity that I am unable to tread it. I haven't many convictions; but I have three or four that I hold strongly. One is that people, on the whole, had better not marry their cousins. Another is, that people in an advanced stage of pulmonary weakness had better not marry at all."

The old man raised his feeble hand and moved it to and fro a little before his face.

"What do you mean by that? You look at things in a way that would make everything wrong. What sort of a cousin is a cousin that you have never seen for more than twenty years of her life? We are all each other's cousins, and if we stopped at that the human race would die out. It is just the same with your weak lungs. You are a great deal better than you used to be. All you want is to lead a natural life. It's a great deal more natural to marry a pretty young lady that you are in love with than it is to remain single on false principles."

"I am not in love with Isabel," said Ralph.

"You said just now that you would be if you didn't think it was wrong. I want to prove to you that it isn't wrong."

"It will only tire you, dear daddy," said Ralph, who marvelled at his father's tenacity and at his finding strength to insist. "Then where shall we all be?"

"Where shall you be if I don't provide for you? You won't have anything to do with the bank, and you won't have me to take care of. You say you have got so many interests; but I can't make them out."

Ralph leaned back in his chair, with folded arms; his eyes were fixed for some time in meditation. At last, with the air of a man fairly mustering courage—"I take a great interest in my cousin," he said, "but not the sort of interest you desire. I shall not live many years; but I hope I shall live long enough to see what she does with herself. She is entirely independent of me; I can exercise very little in-

fluence upon her life. But I should like to do something for her."

"What should you like to do?"

"I should like to put a little wind in her sails."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I should like to put it into her power to do some of the things she wants. She wants to see the world, for instance. I should like to put money in her purse."

"Ah, I am glad you have thought of that," said the old man. "But I have thought of it too. I have left her a legacy —five thousand pounds."

"That is capital; it is very kind of you. But I should like to do a little more."

Something of that veiled acuteness with which it had been on Daniel Touchett's part, the habit of a lifetime to listen to a financial proposition, still lingered in the face in which the invalid had not obliterated the man of business. "I shall be happy to consider it," he said, softly.

"Isabel is poor, then. My mother tells me that she has but a few hundred dollars a year. I should like to make her rich."

"What do you mean by rich?"

"I call people rich when they are able to gratify their imagination. Isabel has a great deal of imagination."

"So have you, my son," said Mr. Touchett, listening very attentively, but a little confusedly.

"You tell me I shall have money enough for two. What I want is that you should kindly relieve me of my superfluity and give it to Isabel. Divide my inheritance into two equal halves, and give the second half to her."

"To do what she likes with?"

"Absolutely what she likes."

"And without an equivalent?"

"What equivalent could there be?"

"The one I have already mentioned."

"Her marrying—some one or other? It's just to do away with anything of that sort that I make my suggestion. If she has an easy income she will never have to marry for a support. She wishes to be free, and your bequest will make her free."

"Well, you seem to have thought it out," said Mr. Touchett. "But I don't see why you appeal to me. The money will be yours, and you can easily give it to her yourself."

Ralph started a little. "Ah, dear father, *I* can't offer Isabel money!"

The old man gave a groan. "Don't tell me you are not in love with her! Do you want me to have the credit of it?"

"Entirely. I should like it simply to be a clause in your will, without the slightest reference to me."

"Do you want me to make a new will, then?"

"A few words will do it; you can attend to it the next time you feel a little lively."

"You must telegraph to Mr. Hilary then. I will do nothing without my solicitor."

"You shall see Mr. Hilary to-morrow."

"He will think we have quarrelled, you and I," said the old man.

"Very probably; I shall like him to think it," said Ralph, smiling; "and to carry out the idea, I give you notice that I shall be very sharp with you."

The humour of this appeared to touch his father; he lay a little while taking it in.

"I will do anything you like," he said at last; "but I'm not sure it's right. You say you want to put wind in her sails; but aren't you afraid of putting too much?"

"I should like to see her going before the breeze!" Ralph answered.

"You speak as if it were for your entertainment."

"So it is, a good deal."

"Well, I don't think I understand," said Mr. Touchett, with a sigh. "Young men are very different from what I was. When I cared for a girl—when I was young—I wanted to do more than look at her. You have scruples that I shouldn't have had, and you have ideas that I shouldn't have had either. You say that Isabel wants to be free, and that her being rich will keep her from marrying for money. Do you think that she is a girl to do that?"

"By no means. But she has less money than she has ever had before; but her father gave her everything, because he used to spend his capital. She has nothing but the crumbs of

that feast to live on, and she doesn't really know how meagre they are—she has yet to learn it. My mother has told me all about it. Isabel will learn it when she is really thrown upon the world, and it would be very painful to me to think of her coming to the consciousness of a lot of wants that she should be unable to satisfy."

"I have left her five thousand pounds. She can satisfy a good many wants with that."

"She can indeed. But she would probably spend it in two or three years."

"You think she would be extravagant then?"

"Most certainly," said Ralph, smiling serenely.

Poor Mr. Touchett's acuteness was rapidly giving place to pure confusion. "It would merely be a question of time, then, her spending the larger sum!"

"No, at first I think she would plunge into that pretty freely; she would probably make over part of it to each of her sisters. But after that she would come to her senses, remember that she had still a lifetime before her, and live within her means."

"Well, you *have* worked it out," said the old man, with a sigh. "You do take an interest in her, certainly."

"You can't consistently say I go too far. You wished me to go further."

"Well, I don't know," the old man answered. "I don't think I enter into your spirit. It seems to me immoral."

"Immoral, dear daddy?"

"Well, I don't know that it's right to make everything so easy for a person."

"It surely depends upon the person. When the person is good, your making things easy is all to the credit of virtue. To facilitate the execution of good impulses, what can be a nobler act?"

This was a little difficult to follow, and Mr. Touchett considered it for a while. At last he said—

"Isabel is a sweet young girl; but do you think she is as good as that?"

"She is as good as her best opportunities," said Ralph.

"Well," Mr. Touchett declared, "she ought to get a great many opportunities for sixty thousand pounds."

"I have no doubt she will."

"Of course I will do what you want," said the old man "I only want to understand it a little."

"Well, dear daddy, don't you understand it now?" his son asked, caressingly. "If you don't, we won't take any more trouble about it; we will leave it alone."

Mr. Touchett lay silent a long time. Ralph supposed that he had given up the attempt to understand it. But at last he began again—

"Tell me this first. Doesn't it occur to you that a young lady with sixty thousand pounds may fall a victim to the fortune-hunters?"

"She will hardly fall a victim to more than one."

"Well, one is too many."

"Decidedly. That's a risk, and it has entered into my calculation. I think it's appreciable, but I think it's small, and I am prepared to take it."

Poor Mr. Touchett's acuteness had passed into perplexity, and his perplexity now passed into admiration.

"Well, you *have* gone into it!" he exclaimed. "But I don't see what good you are to get of it."

Ralph leaned over his father's pillows and gently smoothed them; he was aware that their conversation had been prolonged to a dangerous point. "I shall get just the good that I said just now I wished to put into Isabel's reach—that of having gratified my imagination. But it's scandalous, the way I have taken advantage of you!"

CHAPTER XIX

AS Mrs. Touchett had foretold, Isabel and Madame Merle were thrown much together during the illness of their host, and if they had not become intimate it would have been almost a breach of good manners. Their manners were of the best; but in addition to this they happened to please each other. It is perhaps too much to say that they swore an eternal friendship; but tacitly, at least, they called the future to witness. Isabel did so with a perfectly good conscience, although she would have hesitated to admit that she was intimate with her new friend in the sense which she privately attached to this term She often wondered, indeed, whether she ever had been, or ever could be, intimate with any one. She had an ideal of friendship, as well as of several other sentiments, and it did not seem to her in this case—it had not seemed to her in other cases—that the actual completely expressed it. But she often reminded herself that there were essential reasons why one's ideal could not become concrete. It was a thing to believe in, not to see—a matter of faith, not of experience. Experience, however might supply us with very creditable imitations of it, and the part of wisdom was to make the best of these. Certainly, on the whole, Isabel had never encountered a more agreeable and interesting woman than Madame Merle; she had never met a woman who had less of that fault which is the principal obstacle to friendship—the air of reproducing the more tiresome parts of one's own personality. The gates of the girl's confidence were opened wider than they had ever been; she said things to Madame Merle that she had not yet said to any one. Sometimes she took alarm at her candour; it was as if she had given to a comparative stranger the key to her cabinet of jewels. These spiritual gems were the only ones of any magnitude that Isabel possessed; but that was all the greater reason why

they should be carefully guarded. Afterwards, however, the girl always said to herself that one should never regret a generous error, and that if Madame Merle had not the merits she attributed to her, so much the worse for Madame Merle. There was no doubt she had great merits—she was a charming, sympathetic, intelligent, cultivated woman. More than this (for it had not been Isabel's ill-fortune to go through life without meeting several persons of her own sex, of whom no less could fairly be said), she was rare, she was superior, she was pre-eminent. There are a great many amiable people in the world, and Madame Merle was far from being vulgarly good-natured and restlessly witty. She knew how to think—an accomplishment rare in women; and she had thought to very good purpose. Of course, too, she knew how to feel; Isabel could not have spent a week with her without being sure of that. This was, indeed, Madame Merle's great talent, her most perfect gift. Life had told upon her; she had felt it strongly, and it was part of the satisfaction that Isabel found in her society that when the girl talked of what she was pleased to call serious matters, her companion understood her so easily and quickly. Emotion, it is true, had become with her rather historic; she made no secret of the fact that the fountain of sentiment, thanks to having been rather violently tapped at one period, did not flow quite so freely as of yore. Her pleasure was now to judge rather than to feel; she freely admitted that of old she had been rather foolish, and now she pretended to be wise.

"I judge more than I used to," she said to Isabel; "but it seems to me that I have earned the right. One can't judge till one is forty; before that we are too eager, too hard, too cruel, and in addition too ignorant. I am sorry for you; it will be a long time before you are forty. But every gain is a loss of some kind; I often think that after forty one can't really feel. The freshness, the quickness have certainly gone. You will keep them longer than most people; it will be a great satisfaction to me to see you some years hence. I want to see what life makes of you. One thing is certain—it can't spoil you. It may pull you about horribly; but I defy it to break you up."

Isabel received this assurance as a young soldier, still panting from a slight skirmish in which he has come off with honour, might receive a pat on the shoulder from his colonel. Like such a recognition of merit, it seemed to come with authority. How could the lightest word do less, of a person who was prepared to say, of almost everything Isabel told her—"Oh, I have been in that, my dear; it passes, like everything else." Upon many of her interlocutors, Madame Merle might have produced an irritating effect; it was so difficult to surprise her. But Isabel, though by no means incapable of desiring to be effective, had not at present this motive. She was too sincere, too interested in her judicious companion. And then, moreover, Madame Merle never said such things in the tone of triumph or of boastfulness; they dropped from her like grave confessions.

A period of bad weather had settled down upon Gardencourt; the days grew shorter, and there was an end to the pretty tea-parties on the lawn. But Isabel had long in-door conversations with her fellow-visitor, and in spite of the rain the two ladies often sallied forth for a walk, equipped with the defensive apparatus which the English climate and the English genius have between them brought to such perfection. Madame Merle was very appreciative; she liked almost everything, including the English rain. "There is always a little of it and never too much at once," she said; "and it never wets you, and it always smells good. She declared that in England the pleasures of smell were great—that in this inimitable island there was a certain mixture of fog and beer and soot which, however odd it might sound, was the national aroma, and was most agreeable to the nostril; and she used to lift the sleeve of her British overcoat and bury her nose in it, to inhale the clear, fine odour of the wool. Poor Ralph Touchett, as soon as the autumn had begun to define itself, became almost a prisoner; in bad weather he was unable to step out of the house, and he used sometimes to stand at one of the windows, with his hands in his pockets, and, with a countenance half rueful, half critical, watch Isabel and Madame Merle as they walked down the avenue under a pair of umbrellas. The roads about Gardencourt were so firm, even in the worst weather,

that the two ladies always came back with a healthy glow in their cheeks, looking at the soles of their neat, stout boots, and declaring that their walk had done them inexpressible good. Before lunch Madame Merle was always engaged; Isabel admired the inveteracy with which she occupied herself. Our heroine had always passed for a person of resources and had taken a certain pride in being one; but she envied the talents, the accomplishments, the aptitudes, of Madame Merle. She found herself desiring to emulate them, and in this and other ways Madame Merle presented herself as a model. "I should like to be like that!" Isabel secretly exclaimed, more than once, as one of her friend's numerous facets suddenly caught the light, and before long she knew that she had learned a lesson from this exemplary woman. It took no very long time, indeed, for Isabel to feel that she was, as the phrase is, under an influence. "What is the harm," she asked herself, "so long as it is a good one? The more one is under a good influence the better. The only thing is to see our steps as we take them—to understand them as we go. That I think I shall always do. I needn't be afraid of becoming too pliable; it is my fault that I am not pliable enough." It is said that imitation is the sincerest flattery; and if Isabel was tempted to reproduce in her deportment some of the most graceful features of that of her friend, it was not so much because she desired herself to shine as because she wished to hold up the lamp for Madame Merle. She liked her extremely; but she admired her even more than she liked her. She sometimes wondered what Henrietta Stackpole would say to her thinking so much of this brilliant fugitive from Brooklyn; and had a conviction that Henrietta would not approve of it. Henrietta would not like Madame Merle; for reasons that she could not have defined, this truth came home to Isabel. On the other hand she was equally sure that should the occasion offer, her new friend would accommodate herself perfectly to her old; Madame Merle was too humorous, too observant, not to do justice to Henrietta, and on becoming acquainted with her would probably give the measure of a tact which Miss Stackpole could not hope to emulate. She appeared to have, in her experience, a touchstone for every-

thing, and somewhere in the capacious pocket of her genial memory she would find the key to Henrietta's virtues. "That is the great thing," Isabel reflected; "that is the supreme good fortune: to be in a better position for appreciating people than they are for appreciating you." And she added that this, when one considered it, was simply the essence of the aristocratic situation. In this light, if in none other, one should aim at the aristocratic situation.

I cannot enumerate all the links in the chain which led Isabel to think of Madame Merle's situation as aristocratic—a view of it never expressed in any reference made to it by that lady herself. She had known great things and great people, but she had never played a great part. She was one of the small ones of the earth; she had not been born to honours; she knew the world too well to be guilty of any fatuous illusions on the subject of her own place in it. She had known a good many of the fortunate few, and was perfectly aware of those points at which their fortune differed from hers. But if by her own measure she was nothing of a personage, she had yet, to Isabel's imagination, a sort of greatness. To be so graceful, so gracious, so wise, so good, and to make so light of it all—that was really to be a great lady; especially when one looked so much like one. If Madame Merle, however, made light of her advantages as regards the world, it was not because she had not, for her own entertainment, taken them, as I have intimated, as seriously as possible. Her natural talents, for instance; these she had zealously cultivated. After breakfast she wrote a succession of letters; her correspondence was a source of surprise to Isabel when they sometimes walked together to the village post-office, to deposit Madame Merle's contribution to the mail. She knew a multitude of people, and, as she told Isabel, something was always turning up to be written about. Of painting she was devotedly fond, and made no more of taking a sketch than of pulling off her gloves. At Gardencourt she was perpetually taking advantage of an hour's sunshine to go out with a camp-stool and a box of water-colours. That she was a brilliant musician we have already perceived, and it was evidence of the fact that when she seated herself at the piano, as

she always did in the evening, her listeners resigned themselves without a murmur to losing the entertainment of her talk. Isabel, since she had known Madame Merle, felt ashamed of her own playing, which she now looked upon as meagre and artless; and indeed, though she had been thought to play very well, the loss to society when, in taking her place upon the music-stool, she turned her back to the room, was usually deemed greater than the gain. When Madame Merle was neither writing, nor painting, nor touching the piano, she was usually employed upon wonderful morsels of picturesque embroidery, cushions, curtains, decorations for the chimney-piece; a sort of work in which her bold, free invention was as remarkable as the agility of her needle. She was never idle, for when she was engaged in none of the ways I have mentioned, she was either reading (she appeared to Isabel to read everything important), or walking out, or playing patience with the cards, or talking with her fellow inmates. And with all this, she always had the social quality: she never was preoccupied, she never pressed too hard. She laid down her pastimes as easily as she took them up; she worked and talked at the same time, and she appeared to attach no importance to anything she did. She gave away her sketches and tapestries; she rose from the piano, or remained there, according to the convenience of her auditors, which she always unerringly divined. She was, in short, a most comfortable, profitable, agreeable person to live with. If for Isabel she had a fault, it was that she was not natural; by which the girl meant, not that she was affected or pretentious; for from these vulgar vices no woman could have been more exempt; but that her nature had been too much over-laid by custom and her angles too much smoothed. She had become too flexible, too supple; she was too finished, too civilised. She was, in a word, too perfectly the social animal that man and woman are supposed to have been intended to be; and she had rid herself of every remnant of that tonic wildness which we may assume to have belonged even to the most amiable persons in the ages before country-house life was the fashion. Isabel found it difficult to think of Madame Merle as an isolated figure; she existed only in her relations with her

fellow-mortals. Isabel often wondered what her relations might be with her own soul. She always ended, however, by feeling that having a charming surface does not necessarily prove that one is superficial; this was an illusion in which, in her youth, she had only just sufficiently escaped being nourished. Madame Merle was not superficial—not she. She was deep; and her nature spoke none the less in her behaviour because it spoke a conventional language. "What is language at all but a convention?" said Isabel. "She has the good taste not to pretend, like some people I have met, to express herself by original signs."

"I am afraid you have suffered much," Isabel once found occasion to say to her, in response to some allusion that she had dropped.

"What makes you think that?" Madame Merle asked, with a picturesque smile. "I hope I have not the pose of a martyr."

"No; but you sometimes say things that I think people who have always been happy would not have found out."

"I have not always been happy," said Madame Merle, smiling still, but with a mock gravity, as if she were telling a child a secret. "What a wonderful thing!"

"A great many people give me the impression of never having felt anything very much," Isabel answered.

"It's very true; there are more iron pots, I think, than porcelain ones. But you may depend upon it that every one has something; even the hardest iron pots have a little bruise, a little hole, somewhere. I flatter myself that I am rather stout porcelain; but if I must tell you the truth I have been chipped and cracked! I do very well for service yet, because I have been cleverly mended; and I try to remain in the cupboard—the quiet, dusky cupboard, where there is an odour of stale spices—as much as I can. But when I have to come out, and into a strong light, then, my dear, I am a horror!"

I know not whether it was on this occasion or some other, that when the conversation had taken the turn I have just indicated, she said to Isabel that some day she would relate her history. Isabel assured her that she should delight to listen to it, and reminded her more than once of this en-

gagement. Madame Merle, however, appeared to desire a postponement, and at last frankly told the young girl that she must wait till they knew each other better. This would certainly happen; a long friendship lay before them. Isabel assented, but at the same time asked Madame Merle if she could not trust her—if she feared a betrayal of confidence.

"It is not that I am afraid of your repeating what I say," the elder lady answered; "I am afraid, on the contrary, of your taking it too much to yourself. You would judge me too harshly; you are of the cruel age." She preferred for the present to talk to Isabel about Isabel, and exhibited the greatest interest in our heroine's history, her sentiments, opinions, prospects. She made her chatter, and listened to her chatter with inexhaustible sympathy and good nature. In all this there was something flattering to the girl, who knew that Madame Merle knew a great many distinguished people, and had lived, as Mrs. Touchett said, in the best company in Europe. Isabel thought the better of herself for enjoying the favour of a person who had so large a field of comparison; and it was perhaps partly to gratify this sense of profiting by comparison that she often begged her friend to tell her about the people she knew. Madame Merle had been a dweller in many lands, and had social ties in a dozen different countries. "I don't pretend to be learned," she would say, "but I think I know my Europe;" and she spoke one day of going to Sweden to stay with an old friend, and another of going to Wallachia to follow up a new acquaintance. With England, where she had often stayed, she was thoroughly familiar; and for Isabel's benefit threw a great deal of light upon the customs of the country and the character of the people, who "after all," as she was fond of saying, were the finest people in the world.

"You must not think it strange, her staying in the house at such a time as this, when Mr. Touchett is passing away," Mrs. Touchett remarked to Isabel. "She is incapable of doing anything indiscreet; she is the best-bred woman I know. It's a favour to me that she stays; she is putting off a lot of visits at great houses," said Mrs. Touchett, who never forgot that when she herself was in England her social value sank two or three degrees in the scale. "She

has her pick of places; she is not in want of a shelter. But I have asked her to stay because I wish you to know her. I think it will be a good thing for you. Serena Merle has no faults."

"If I didn't already like her very much that description might alarm me," Isabel said.

"She never does anything wrong. I have brought you out here, and I wish to do the best for you. Your sister Lily told me that she hoped I would give you plenty of opportunities. I give you one in securing Madame Merle. She is one of the most brilliant women in Europe."

"I like her better than I like your description of her," Isabel persisted in saying.

"Do you flatter yourself that you will find a fault in her? I hope you will let me know when you do."

"That will be cruel—to you," said Isabel.

"You needn't mind me. You never will find one."

"Perhaps not; but I think I shall not miss it."

"She is always up to the mark!" said Mrs. Touchett.

Isabel after this said to Madame Merle that she hoped she knew Mrs. Touchett believed she had not a fault.

"I am obliged to you, but I am afraid your aunt has no perception of spiritual things," Madame Merle answered.

"Do you mean by that that you have spiritual faults?"

"Ah no; I mean nothing so flat? I mean that having no faults, for your aunt, means that one is never late for dinner —that is, for *her* dinner. I was not late, by the way, the other day, when you came back from London; the clock was just at eight when I came into the drawing-room; it was the rest of you that were before the time. It means that one answers a letter the day one gets it, and that when one comes to stay with her one doesn't bring too much luggage, and is careful not to be taken ill. For Mrs. Touchett those things constitute virtue; it's a blessing to be able to reduce it to its elements."

Madame Merle's conversation, it will be perceived, was enriched with bold, free touches of criticism, which, even when they had a restrictive effect, never struck Isabel as ill-natured. It never occurred to the girl, for instance, that Mrs. Touchett's accomplished guest was abusing her; and

this for very good reasons. In the first place Isabel agreed with her; in the second Madame Merle implied that there was a great deal more to say; and in the third, to speak to one without ceremony of one's near relations was an agreeable sign of intimacy. These signs of intimacy multiplied as the days elapsed, and there was none of which Isabel was more sensible than of her companion's preference for making Miss Archer herself a topic. Though she alluded frequently to the incidents of her own life, she never lingered upon them; she was as little of an egotist as she was of a gossip.

"I am old, and stale, and faded," she said more than once; "I am of no more interest than last week's newspaper. You are young and fresh, and of to-day; you have the great thing—you have actuality. I once had it—we all have it for an hour. You, however, will have it for longer. Let us talk about you, then, you can say nothing that I shall not care to hear. It is a sign that I am growing old—that I like to talk with younger people. I think it's a very pretty compensation. If we can't have youth within us we can have it outside of us, and I really think we see it and feel it better that way. Of course we must be in sympathy with it —that I shall always be. I don't know that I shall ever be ill-natured with old people—I hope not; there are certainly some old people that I adore. But I shall never be ill-natured with the young; they touch me too much. I give you *carte blanche,* then; you can even be impertinent if you like; I shall let it pass. I talk as if I were a hundred years old, you say? Well, I am, if you please; I was born before the French Revolution. Ah, my dear *je viens de loin;* I belong to the old world. But it is not of that I wish to talk; I wish to talk about the new. You must tell me more about America; you never tell me enough. Here I have been since I was brought here as a helpless child, and it is ridiculous, or rather it's scandalous, how little I know about the land of my birth. There are a great many of us like that, over here; and I must say I think we are a wretched set of people. You should live in your own country; whatever it may be you have your natural place there. If we are not good Americans we are certainly poor Europeans; we have no

natural place here. We are mere parasites, crawling over the surface; we haven't our feet in the soil. At least one can know it, and not have illusions. A woman, perhaps, can get on; a woman, it seems to me, has no natural place anywhere; wherever she finds herself she has to remain on the surface and, more or less, to crawl. You protest, my dear? you are horrified? you declare you will never crawl? It is very true that I don't see you crawling; you stand more upright than a good many poor creatures. Very good; on the whole, I don't think you will crawl. But the men, the Americans; *je vous demande un peu,* what do they make of it over here? I don't envy them, trying to arrange themselves. Look at poor Ralph Touchett; what sort of a figure do you call that? Fortunately he has got a consumption; I say fortunately, because it gives him something to do. His consumption is his career; it's a kind of position. You can say, 'Oh, Mr. Touchett, he takes care of his lungs, he knows a great deal about climates.' But without that, who would he be, what would he represent? 'Mr. Ralph Touchett, an American who lives in Europe.' That signifies absolutely nothing—it's impossible that anything should signify less. 'He is very cultivated,' they say; 'he has got a very pretty collection of old snuff-boxes.' The collection is all that is wanted to make it pitiful. I am tired of the sound of the word; I think it's grotesque. With the poor old father it's different; he has his identity, and it is rather a massive one. He represents a great financial house, and that, in our day, is as good as anything else. For an American, at any rate, that will do very well. But I persist in thinking your cousin is very lucky to have a chronic malady; so long as he doesn't die of it. It's much better than the snuff-boxes. If he were not ill, you say, he would do something?—he would take his father's place in the house. My poor child, I doubt it; I don't think he is at all fond of the house. However, you know him better than I, though I used to know him rather well, and he may have the benefit of the doubt. The worst case, I think, is a friend of mine, a countryman of ours, who lives in Italy (where he also was brought before he knew better), and who is one of the most delightful men I know. Some day you must know him. I will bring you together,

and then you will see what I mean. He is Gilbert Osmond—he lives in Italy; that is all one can say about him. He is exceedingly clever, a man made to be distinguished; but, as I say, you exhaust the description when you say that he is Mr. Osmond, who lives in Italy. No career, no name, no position, no fortune, no past, no future, no anything. Oh yes, he paints, if you please—paints in water-colours, like me, only better than I. His painting is pretty bad; on the whole I am rather glad of that. Fortunately he is very indolent, so indolent that it amounts to a sort of position. He can say, 'Oh, I do nothing; I am too deadly lazy. You can do nothing to-day unless you get up at five o'clock in the morning.' In that way he becomes a sort of exception; you feel that he might do something if he would only rise early. He never speaks of his painting—to people at large; he is too clever for that. But he has a little girl—a dear little girl; he does speak of her. He is devoted to her, and if it were a career to be an excellent father he would be very distinguished. But I am afraid that is no better than the snuff-boxes; perhaps not even so good. Tell me what they do in America," pursued Madame Merle, who, it must be observed, parenthetically, did not deliver herself all at once of these reflections, which are presented in a cluster for the convenience of the reader. She talked of Florence, where Mr. Osmond lived, and where Mrs. Touchett occupied a mediæval palace; she talked of Rome, where she herself had a little *pied-à-terre,* with some rather good old damask. She talked of places, of people, and even, as the phrase is, of "subjects"; and from time to time she talked of their kind old host and of the prospect of his recovery. From the first she had thought this prospect small, and Isabel had been struck with the positive, discriminating, competent way which she took of the measure of his remainder of life. One evening she announced definitely that he would not live.

"Sir Matthew Hope told me so, as plainly as was proper," she said; "standing there, near the fire, before dinner. He makes himself very agreeable, the great doctor. I don't mean that his saying that has anything to do with it. But he says such things with great tact. I had said to him that I felt

ill at my ease, staying here at such a time; it seemed to me so indiscreet—it was not as if I could nurse. 'You must remain, you must remain,' he answered; 'your office will come later.' Was not that a very delicate way both of saying that poor Mr. Touchett would go, and that I might be of some use as a consoler? In fact, however, I shall not be of the slightest use. Your aunt will console herself; she, and she alone, knows just how much consolation she will require. It would be a very delicate matter for another person to undertake to administer the dose. With your cousin it will be different; he will miss his father sadly. But I should never presume to condole with Mr. Ralph; we are not on those terms."

Madame Merle had alluded more than once to some undefined incongruity in her relations with Ralph Touchett; so Isabel took this occasion of asking her if they were not good friends.

"Perfectly, but he doesn't like me."

"What have you done to him?"

"Nothing whatever. But one has no need of a reason for that."

"For not liking you? I think one has need of a very good reason."

"You are very kind. Be sure you have one ready for the day when you begin."

"Begin to dislike you? I shall never begin."

"I hope not; because if you do, you will never end. That is the way with your cousin; he doesn't get over it. It's an antipathy of nature—if I can call it that when it is all on his side. I have nothing whatever against him, and don't bear him the least little grudge for not doing me justice. Justice is all I want. However, one feels that he is a gentleman, and would never say anything underhand about one. *Cartes sur table,*" Madame Merle subjoined in a moment, "I am not afraid of him."

"I hope not, indeed," said Isabel, who added something about his being the kindest fellow living. She remembered, however, that on her first asking him about Madame Merle he had answered her in a manner which this lady might have thought injurious without being explicit. There was

something between them, Isabel said to herself, but she said nothing more than this. If it were something of importance, it should inspire respect; if it were not, it was not worth her curiosity. With all her love of knowledge, Isabel had a natural shrinking from raising curtains and looking into unlighted corners. The love of knowledge coexisted in her mind with a still tender love of ignorance.

But Madame Merle sometimes said things that startled her, made her raise her clear eyebrows at the time, and think of the words afterwards.

"I would give a great deal to be your age again," she broke out once, with a bitterness which, though diluted in her customary smile, was by no means disguised by it. "If I could only begin again—if I could have my life before me!"

"Your life is before you yet," Isabel answered gently, for she was vaguely awe-struck.

"No; the best part is gone, and gone for nothing."

"Surely, not for nothing," said Isabel.

"Why not—what have I got? Neither husband, nor child, nor fortune, nor position, nor the traces of a beauty which I never had."

"You have friends, dear lady."

"I am not so sure!" cried Madame Merle.

"Ah, you are wrong. You have memories, talents——"

Madame Merle interrupted her.

"What have my talents brought me? Nothing but the need of using them still, to get through the hours, the years, to cheat myself with some pretence of action. As for my memories, the less said about them the better. You will be my friend till you find a better use for your friendship."

"It will be for you to see that I don't then," said Isabel.

"Yes; I would make an effort to keep you," Madame Merle rejoined, looking at her gravely. "When I say I should like to be your age," she went on, "I mean with your qualities—frank, generous, sincere, like you. In that case I should have made something better of my life."

"What should you have liked to do that you have not done?"

Madame Merle took a sheet of music—she was seated at the piano, and had abruptly wheeled about on the stool when she first spoke—and mechanically turned the leaves. At last she said—

"I am very ambitious!"

"And your ambitions have not been satisfied? They must have been great."

"They were great. I should make myself ridiculous by talking of them."

Isabel wondered what they could have been—whether Madame Merle had aspired to wear a crown. "I don't know what your idea of success may be, but you seem to me to have been successful. To me, indeed, you are an image of success."

Madame Merle tossed away the music with a smile.

"What is *your* idea of success?"

"You evidently think it must be very tame," said Isabel. "It is to see some dream of one's youth come true."

"Ah," Madame Merle exclaimed, "that I have never seen! But my dreams were so great—so preposterous. Heaven forgive me, I am dreaming now." And she turned back to the piano and began to play with energy.

On the morrow she said to Isabel that her definition of success had been very pretty, but frightfully sad. Measured in that way, who had succeeded? The dreams of one's youth, why they were enchanting, they were divine! Who had ever seen such things come to pass?

"I myself—a few of them," Isabel ventured to answer.

"Already? They must have been dreams of yesterday."

"I began to dream very young," said Isabel, smiling.

"Ah, if you mean the aspirations of your childhood—that of having a pink sash and a doll that could close her eyes."

"No, I don't mean that."

"Or a young man with a moustache going down on his knees to you."

"No, nor that either," Isabel declared, blushing.

Madame Merle gave a glance at her blush which caused it to deepen.

"I suspect that is what you do mean. We have all had the

young man with the moustache. He is the inevitable young man; he doesn't count."

Isabel was silent for a moment, and then, with extreme and characteristic inconsequence—

"Why shouldn't he count? There are young men and young men."

"And yours was a paragon—is that what you mean?" cried her friend with a laugh. "If you have had the identical young man you dreamed of, then that was success, and I congratulate you. Only, in that case, why didn't you fly with him to his castle in the Apennines?"

"He has no castle in the Apennines."

"What has he? An ugly brick house in Fortieth Street? Don't tell me that; I refuse to recognise that as an ideal."

"I don't care anything about his house," said Isabel.

"That is very crude of you. When you have lived as long as I, you will see that every human being has his shell, and that you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There is no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we are each of us made up of a cluster of appurtenances. What do you call one's self? Where does it begin? where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us—and then it flows back again. I know that a large part of myself is in the dresses I choose to wear. I have a great respect for *things!* One's self—for other people—is one's expression of one's self; and one's house, one's clothes, the book one reads, the company one keeps—these things are all expressive."

This was very metaphysical; not more so, however, than several observations Madame Merle had already made. Isabel was found of metaphysics, but she was unable to accompany her friend into this bold analysis of the human personality.

"I don't agree with you," she said. "I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. Nothing that belongs to me is any measure of me; on the contrary, it's a limit, a barrier, and a perfectly arbitrary one. Certainly, the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!"

"You dress very well," interposed Madame Merle, skilfully.

"Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with, it's not my own choice that I wear them; they are imposed upon me by society."

"Should you prefer to go without them?" Madame Merle inquired, in a tone which virtually terminated the discussion.

I am bound to confess, though it may cast some discredit upon the sketch I have given of the youthful loyalty which our heroine practised towards this accomplished woman, that Isabel had said nothing whatever to her about Lord Warburton, and had been equally reticent on the subject of Caspar Goodwood. Isabel had not concealed from her, however, that she had had opportunities of marrying, and had even let her know that they were of a highly advantageous kind. Lord Warburton had left Lockleigh, and was gone to Scotland, taking his sisters with him; and though he had written to Ralph more than once, to ask about Mr. Touchett's health, the girl was not liable to the embarrassment of such inquiries as, had he still been in the neighbourhood, he would probably have felt bound to make in person. He had admirable self-control, but she felt sure that if he had come to Gardencourt he would have seen Madame Merle, and that if he had seen her he would have liked her, and betrayed to her that he was in love with her young friend.

It so happened that during Madame Merle's previous visits to Gardencourt—each of them much shorter than the present one—he had either not been at Lockleigh or had not called at Mr. Touchett's. Therefore, though she knew him by name as the great man of that county, she had no cause to suspect him of being a suitor of Mrs. Touchett's freshly-imported niece.

"You have plenty of time," she had said to Isabel, in return for the mutilated confidences which Isabel made her, and which did not pretend to be perfect, though we have seen that at moments the girl had compunctions at having said so much. "I am glad you have done nothing yet—that you have it still to do. It is a very good thing for a girl to have refused a few good offers—so long, of course, as they are not the best she is likely to have. Excuse me if my tone seems

horribly worldly; one must take that view sometimes. Only don't keep on refusing for the sake of refusing. It's a pleasant exercise of power; but accepting is after all an exercise of power as well. There is always the danger of refusing once too often. It was not the one I fell into—I didn't refuse often enough. You are an exquisite creature, and I should like to see you married to a prime minister. But speaking strictly, you know you are not what is technically called a *parti*. You are extremely good looking, and extremely clever; in yourself you are quite exceptional. You appear to have the vaguest ideas about your earthly possessions; but from what I can make out, you are not embarrassed with an income. I wish you had a little money."

"I wish I had!" said Isabel, simply, apparently forgetting for the moment that her poverty had been a venial fault for two gallant gentlemen.

In spite of Sir Matthew Hope's benevolent recommendation, Madame Merle did not remain to the end, as the issue of poor Mr. Touchett's malady had now come frankly to be designated. She was under pledges to other people which had at last to be redeemed, and she left Gardencourt with the understanding that she should in any event see Mrs. Touchett there again, or in town, before quitting England. Her parting with Isabel was even more like the beginning of a friendship than their meeting had been.

"I am going to six places in succession," she said, "but I shall see no one I like so well as you. They will all be old friends, however; one doesn't make new friends at my age. I have made a great exception for you. You must remember that, and you must think well of me. You must reward me by believing in me."

By way of answer, Isabel kissed her, and though some women kiss with facility, there are kisses and kisses, and this embrace was satisfactory to Madame Merle.

Isabel, after this, was much alone; she saw her aunt and cousin only at meals, and discovered that of the hours that Mrs. Touchett was invisible, only a minor portion was now devoted to nursing her husband. She spent the rest in her own apartments, to which access was not allowed even to her niece, in mysterious and inscrutable exercises. At table

she was grave and silent; but her solemnity was not an attitude—Isabel could see that it was a conviction. She wondered whether her aunt repented of having taken her own way so much; but there was no visible evidence of this—no tears, no sighs, no exaggeration of a zeal which had always deemed itself sufficient. Mrs. Touchett seemed simply to feel the need of thinking things over and summing them up; she had a little moral account-book—with columns unerringly ruled, and a sharp steel clasp—which she kept with exemplary neatness.

"If I had foreseen this I would not have proposed your coming abroad now," she said to Isabel after Madame Merle had left the house. "I would have waited and sent for you next year."

Her remarks had usually a practical ring.

"So that perhaps I should never have known my uncle? It's a great happiness to me to have come now."

"That's very well. But it was not that you might know your uncle that I brought you to Europe." A perfectly veracious speech; but, as Isabel thought, not as perfectly timed.

She had leisure to think of this and other matters. She took a solitary walk every day, and spent much time in turning over the books in the library. Among the subjects that engaged her attention were the adventures of her friend Miss Stackpole, with whom she was in regular correspondence. Isabel liked her friend's private epistolary style better than her public; that is, she thought her public letters would have been excellent if they had not been printed. Henrietta's career, however, was not so successful as might have been wished even in the interest of her private felicity; that view of the inner life of Great Britain which she was so eager to take appeared to dance before her like an *ignis fatuus*. The invitation from Lady Pensil, for mysterious reasons, had never arrived; and poor Mr. Bantling himself, with all his friendly ingenuity, had been unable to explain so grave a dereliction on the part of a missive that had obviously been sent. Mr. Bantling, however, had evidently taken Henrietta's affairs much to heart, and believed that he owed her a set-off to this illusory visit to Bedfordshire. "He says he should

think I would go to the Continent," Henrietta wrote; "and as he thinks of going there himself, I suppose his advice is sincere. He wants to know why I don't take a view of French life; and it is a fact that I want very much to see the new Republic. Mr. Bantling doesn't care much about the Republic, but he thinks of going over to Paris any way. I must say he is quite as attentive as I could wish, and at any rate I shall have seen one polite Englishman. I keep telling Mr. Bantling that he ought to have been an American; and you ought to see how it pleases him. Whenever I say so, he always breaks out with the same exclamation—'Ah, but really, come now!'" A few days later she wrote that she had decided to go to Paris at the end of the week, and that Mr. Bantling had promised to see her off—perhaps even he would go as far as Dover with her. She would wait in Paris till Isabel should arrive, Henrietta added; speaking quite as if Isabel were to start on her Continental journey alone, and making no allusion to Mrs. Touchett. Bearing in mind his interest in their late companion, our heroine communicated several passages from Miss Stackpole's letters to Ralph, who followed with an emotion akin to suspense the career of the correspondent of the *Interviewer*.

"It seems to me that she is doing very well," he said, "going over to Paris with an ex-guardsman! If she wants something to write about, she has only to describe that episode."

"It is not conventional, certainly," Isabel answered; "but if you mean that—as far as Henrietta is concerned—it is not perfectly innocent, you are very much mistaken. You will never understand Henrietta."

"Excuse me; I understand her perfectly. I didn't at all at first; but now I have got the point of view. I am afraid, however, that Bantling has not; he may have some surprises. Oh, I understand Henrietta as well as if I had made her!"

Isabel was by no means sure of this; but she abstained from expressing further doubt, for she was disposed in these days to extend a great charity to her cousin. One afternoon, less than a week after Madame Merle's departure, she was seated in the library with a volume to which her attention was not fastened. She had placed herself in a deep window-

bench, from which she looked out into the dull, damp park; and as the library stood at right angles to the entrance-front of the house, she could see the doctor's dog-cart, which had been waiting for the last two hours before the door. She was struck with the doctor's remaining so long; but at last she saw him appear in the portico, stand a moment, slowly drawing on his gloves and looking at the knees of his horse, and then get into the vehicle and drive away. Isabel kept her place for half-an-hour; there was a great stillness in the house. It was so great that when she at last heard a soft, slow step on the deep carpet of the room, she was almost startled by the sound. She turned quickly away from the window, and saw Ralph Touchett standing there, with his hands still in his pockets, but with a face absolutely void of its usual latent smile. She got up, and her movement and glance were a question.

"It's all over," said Ralph.

"Do you mean that my uncle——?" And Isabel stopped.

"My father died an hour ago."

"Ah, my poor Ralph!" the girl murmured, putting out her hand to him.

CHAPTER XX

SOME fortnight after this incident Madame Merle drove up in a hansom cab to the house in Winchester Square. As she descended from her vehicle she observed, suspended between the dining-room windows, a large, neat, wooden tablet, on whose fresh black ground were inscribed in white paint the words—"This noble freehold mansion to be sold;" with the name of the agent to whom application should be made. "They certainly lose no time," said the visitor, as, after sounding the big brass knocker, she waited to be admitted; "it's a practical country!" And within the house, as she ascended to the drawing room, she perceived numerous signs of abdication; pictures removed from the walls and placed upon sofas, windows undraped and floors laid bare. Mrs. Touchett presently received her, and intimated in a few words that condolences might be taken for granted.

"I know what you are going to say—he was a very good man. But I know it better than any one, because I gave him more chance to show it. In that I think I was a good wife." Mrs. Touchett added that at the end her husband apparently recognised this fact. "He has treated me liberally," she said; "I won't say more liberally than I expected, because I didn't expect. You know that as a general thing I don't expect. But he chose, I presume, to recognise the fact that though I lived much abroad, and mingled—you may say freely—in foreign life, I never exhibited the smallest preference for any one else."

"For any one but yourself," Madame Merle mentally observed; but the reflection was perfectly inaudible.

"I never sacrificed my husband to another," Mrs. Touchett continued, with her stout curtness.

"Oh no," thought Madame Merle; "you never did anything for another!"

There was a certain cynicism in these mute comments which demands an explanation; the more so as they are not in accord either with the view—somewhat superficial perhaps—that we have hitherto enjoyed of Madame Merle's character, or with the literal facts of Mrs. Touchett's history; the more so, too, as Madame Merle had a well-founded conviction that her friend's last remark was not in the least to be construed as a side-thrust at herself. The truth is, that the moment she had crossed the threshold she received a subtle impression that Mr. Touchett's death had had consequences, and that these consquences had been profitable to a little circle of persons among whom she was not numbered. Of course it was an event which would naturally have consequences; her imagination had more than once rested upon this fact during her stay at Gardencourt. But it had been one thing to foresee it mentally, and it was another to behold it actually. The idea of a distribution of property—she would almost have said of spoils—just now pressed upon her senses and irritated her with a sense of exclusion. I am far from wishing to say that Madame Merle was one of the hungry ones of the world; but we have already perceived that she had desires which had never been satisfied. If she had been questioned, she would of course have admitted—with a most becoming smile—that she had not the faintest claim to a share in Mr. Touchett's relics. "There was never anything in the world between us," she would have said. "There was never that, poor man!"—with a fillip of her thumb and her third finger. I hasten to add, moreover, that if her private attitude at the present moment was somewhat incongruously invidious, she was very careful not to betray herself. She had, after all, as much sympathy for Mrs. Touchett's gains as for her losses.

"He has left me this house," the newly-made widow said; "but of course I shall not live in it; I have a much better house in Florence. The will was opened only three days since, but I have already offered the house for sale. I have also a share in the bank; but I don't yet understand whether I am obliged to leave it there. If not, I shall certainly take it out. Ralph, of course, has Gardencourt; but I am not sure that he will have means to keep up the place. He is of

course left very well off, but his father has given away an immense deal of money; there are bequests to a string of third cousins in Vermont. Ralph, however, is very fond of Gardencourt, and would be quite capable of living there—in summer—with a maid-of-all-work and a gardener's boy. There is one remarkable clause in my husband's will," Mrs. Touchett added. "He has left my niece a fortune."

"A fortune!" Madame Merle repeated softly.

"Isabel steps into something like seventy thousand pounds."

Madame Merle's hands were clasped in her lap; at this she raised them, still clasped, and held them a moment against her bosom, while her eyes, a little dilated, fixed themselves on those of her friend. "Ah," she cried, "the clever creature!"

Mrs. Touchett gave her a quick look. "What do you mean by that?"

For an instant Madame Merle's colour rose, and she dropped her eyes. "It certainly is clever to achieve such results—without an effort!"

"There certainly was no effort; don't call it an achievement."

Madame Merle was rarely guilty of the awkwardness of retracting what she had said; her wisdom was shown rather in maintaining it and placing it in a favourable light. "My dear friend, Isabel would certainly not have had seventy thousand pounds left her if she had not been the most charming girl in the world. Her charm includes great cleverness."

"She never dreamed, I am sure, of my husband's doing anything for her; and I never dreamed of it either, for he never spoke to me of his intention," Mrs. Touchett said. "She had no claim upon him whatever; it was no great recommendation to him that she was my niece. Whatever she achieved she achieved unconsciously."

"Ah," rejoined Madame Merle, "those are the greatest strokes!"

Mrs. Touchett gave a shrug. "The girl is fortunate; I don't deny that. But for the present she is simply stupefied."

"Do you mean that she doesn't know what to do with the money?"

"That, I think she has hardly considered. She doesn't know what to think about the matter at all. It has been as if a big gun were suddenly fired off behind her; she is feeling herself, to see if she be hurt. It is but three days since she received a visit from the principal executor who came in person, very gallantly, to notify her. He told me afterwards that when he had made his little speech she suddenly burst into tears. The money is to remain in the bank, and she is to draw the interest."

Madame Merle shook her head, with a wise, and now quite benignant smile. "After she has done that two or three times she will get used to it." Then after a silence—"What does your son think of it?" she abruptly asked.

"He left England just before it came out—used up by his fatigue and anxiety, and hurrying off to the south. He is on his way to the Riviera, and I have not yet heard from him. But it is not likely he will ever object to anything done by his father."

"Didn't you say his own share had been cut down?"

"Only at his wish. I know that he urged his father to do something for the people in America. He is not in the least addicted to looking after number one."

"It depends upon whom he regards as number one!" said Madame Merle. And she remained thoughtful a moment, with her eyes bent upon the floor. "Am I not to see your happy niece?" she asked at last, looking up.

"You may see her; but you will not be struck with her being happy. She has looked as solemn, these three days, as a Cimabue Madonna!" And Mrs. Touchett rang for a servant.

Isabel came in shortly after the footman had been sent to call her; and Madame Merle thought, as she appeared, that Mrs. Touchett's comparison had its force. The girl was pale and grave—an effect not mitigated by her deeper mourning; but the smile of her brightest moments came into her face as she saw Madame Merle, who went forward, laid her hand on our heroine's shoulder, and after looking at her a moment, kissed her as if she were returning the

kiss that she had received from Isabel at Gardencourt. This was the only allusion that Madame Merle, in her great good taste, made for the present to her young friend's inheritance.

Mrs. Touchett did not remain in London until she had sold her house. After selecting from among its furniture those objects which she wished to transport to her Florentine residence, she left the rest of its contents to be disposed of by the auctioneer, and took her departure for the Continent. She was, of course, accompanied on this journey by her niece, who now had plenty of leisure to contemplate the windfall on which Madame Merle had covertly congratulated her. Isabel thought of it very often and looked at it in a dozen different lights; but we shall not at present attempt to enter into her meditations or to explain why it was that some of them were of a rather pessimistic cast. The pessimism of this young lady was transient; she ultimately made up her mind that to be rich was a virtue, because it was to be able to *do*, and to do was sweet. It was the contrary of weakness. To be weak was, for a young lady, rather graceful, but, after all, as Isabel said to herself, there was a larger grace than that. Just now, it is true, there was not much to do—once she had sent off a cheque to Lily and another to poor Edith; but she was thankful for the quiet months which her mourning robes and her aunt's fresh widowhood compelled the two ladies to spend. The acquisition of power made her serious; she scrutinised her power with a kind of tender ferocity, but she was not eager to exercise it. She began to do so indeed during a stay of some weeks which she presently made with her aunt in Paris, but in ways that will probably be thought rather vulgar. They were the ways that most naturally presented themselves in a city in which the shops are the admiration of the world, especially under the guidance of Mrs. Touchett, who took a rigidly practical view of the transformation of her niece from a poor girl to a rich one. "Now that you are a young woman of fortune you must know how to play the part—I mean to play it well," she said to Isabel, once for all; and she added that the girl's first duty was to have everything handsome. "You

don't know how to take care of your things, but you must learn," she went on; this was Isabel's second duty. Isabel submitted, but for the present her imagination was not kindled; she longed for opportunities, but these were not the opportunities she meant.

Mrs. Touchett rarely changed her plans, and having intended before her husband's death to spend a part of the winter in Paris she saw no reason to deprive herself—still less to deprive her companion—of this advantage. Though they would live in great retirement, she might still present her niece, informally, to the little circle of her fellow-countrymen dwelling upon the skirts of the Champs Elysées. With many of these amiable colonists Mrs. Touchett was intimate; she shared their expatriation, their convictions, their pastimes, their ennui. Isabel saw them come with a good deal of assiduity to her aunt's hotel, and judged them with a trenchancy which is doubtless to be accounted for by the temporary exaltation of her sense of human duty. She made up her mind that their manner of life was superficial, and incurred some disfavour by expressing this view on bright Sunday afternoons, when the American absentees were engaged in calling upon each other. Though her listeners were the most good-natured people in the world, two or three of them thought her cleverness, which was generally admitted, only a dangerous variation of impertinence.

"You all live here this way, but what does it all lead to?" she was pleased to ask. "It doesn't seem to lead to anything, and I should think you would get very tired of it."

Mrs. Touchett thought the question worthy of Henrietta Stackpole. The two ladies had found Henrietta in Paris, and Isabel constantly saw her; so that Mrs. Touchett had some reason for saying to herself that if her niece were not clever enough to originate almost anything, she might be suspected of having borrowed that style of remark from her journalistic friend. The first occasion on which Isabel had spoken was that of a visit paid by the two ladies to Mrs. Luce, an old friend of Mrs. Touchett's, and the only person in Paris she now went to see. Mrs. Luce had been living in Paris since the days of Louis Philippe; she used

to say jocosely that she was one of the generation of 1830—a joke of which the point was not always taken. When it failed Mrs. Luce used always to explain—"Oh yes, I am one of the romantics;" her French had never become very perfect. She was always at home on Sunday afternoons, and surrounded by sympathetic compatriots, usually the same. In fact she was at home at all times, and led in her well-cushioned little corner of the brilliant city as quiet and domestic a life as she might have led in her native Baltimore. The existence of Mr. Luce, her worthy husband, was somewhat more inscrutable. Superficially indeed, there was no mystery about it; the mystery lay deeper, and resided in the wonder of his supporting existence at all. He was the most unoccupied man in Europe, for he not only had no duties, but he had no pleasures. Habits certainly he had, but they were few in number, and had been worn threadbare by forty years of use. Mr. Luce was a tall, lean, grizzled, well-brushed gentleman, who wore a gold eyeglass and carried his hat a little too much on the back of his head. He went every day to the American banker's, where there was a post-office which was almost as sociable and colloquial an institution as that of an American country town. He passed an hour (in fine weather) in a chair in the Champs Elysées, and he dined uncommonly well at his own table, seated above a waxed floor, which it was Mrs. Luce's happiness to believe had a finer polish than any other in Paris. Occasionally he dined with a friend or two at the Café Anglais, where his talent for ordering a dinner was a source of felicity to his companions and an object of admiration even to the head-waiter of the establishment. These were his only known avocations, but they had beguiled his hours for upwards of half a century, and they doubtless justified his frequent declaration that there was no place like Paris. In no other place, on these terms, could Mr. Luce flatter himself that he was enjoying life. There was nothing like Paris, but it must be confessed that Mr. Luce thought less highly of the French capital than in earlier days. In the list of his occupations his political reveries should not be omitted, for they were doubtless the animating principle of many hours that superficially seemed

vacant. Like many of his fellow colonists, Mr. Luce was a high—or rather a deep—conservative, and gave no countenance to the government recently established in France. He had no faith in its duration, and would assure you from year to year that its end was close at hand. "They want to be kept down, sir, to be kept down; nothing but the strong hand—the iron heel—will do for them," he would frequently say of the French people; and his ideal of a fine government was that of the lately-abolished Empire. "Paris is much less attractive than in the days of the Emperor; he knew how to make a city pleasant," Mr. Luce had often remarked to Mrs. Touchett, who was quite of his own way of thinking, and wished to know what one had crossed that odious Atlantic for but to get away from republics.

"Why, madam, sitting in the Champs Elysées, opposite to the Palace of Industry, I have seen the court-carriages from the Tuileries pass up and down as many as seven times a day. I remember one occasion when they went as high as nine times. What do you see now? It's no use talking, the style's all gone. Napoleon knew what the French people want, and there'll be a cloud over Paris till they get the Empire back again."

Among Mrs. Luce's visitors on Sunday afternoons was a young man with whom Isabel had had a good deal of conversation, and whom she found full of valuable knowledge. Mr. Edward Rosier—Ned Rosier, as he was called—was a native of New York, and had been brought up in Paris, living there under the eye of his father, who, as it happened, had been an old and intimate friend of the late Mr. Archer. Edward Rosier remembered Isabel as a little girl; it had been his father who came to the rescue of the little Archers at the inn at Neufchâtel (he was travelling that way with the boy, and stopped at the hotel by chance), after their *bonne* had gone off with the Russian prince and when Mr. Archer's whereabouts remained for some days a mystery. Isabel remembered perfectly the neat little male child, whose hair smelt of a delicious cosmetic, and who had a *bonne* of his own, warranted to lose sight of him under no provocation. Isabel took a walk with the pair beside the lake, and

thought little Edward as pretty as an angel—a comparison by no means conventional in her mind, for she had a very definite conception of a type of features which she supposed to be angelic, and which her new friend perfectly illustrated. A small pink face, surmounted by a blue velvet bonnet and set off by a stiff embroidered collar, became the countenance of her childish dreams; and she firmly believed for some time afterwards that the heavenly hosts conversed among themselves in a queer little dialect of French-English, expressing the properest sentiments, as when Edward told her that he was "defended" by his *bonne* to go near the edge of the lake, and that one must always obey to one's *bonne*. Ned Rosier's English had improved; at least it exhibited in a less degree the French variation. His father was dead and his *bonne* was dismissed, but the young man still conformed to the spirit of their teaching —he never went to the edge of the lake. There was still something agreeable to the nostril about him, and something not offensive to nobler organs. He was a very gentle and gracious youth, with what are called cultivated tastes—an acquaintance with old china, with good wine, with the bindings of books, with the *Almanach de Gotha*, with the best shops, the best hotels, the hours of railway-trains. He could order a dinner almost as well as Mr. Luce, and it was probable that as his experience accumulated he would be a worthy successor to that gentleman, whose rather grim politics he also advocated, in a soft and innocent voice. He had some charming rooms in Paris, decorated with old Spanish altar-lace, the envy of his female friends, who declared that his chimney-piece was better draped than many a duchess. He usually, however, spent a part of every winter at Pau, and had once passed a couple of months in the United States.

He took a great interest in Isabel, and remembered perfectly the walk at Neufchâtel, when she would persist in going so near the edge. He seemed to recognise this same tendency in the subversive inquiry that I quoted a moment ago, and set himself to answer our heroine's question with greater urbanity than it perhaps deserved. "What does it lead to, Miss Archer? Why Paris leads everywhere.

You can't go anywhere unless you come here first. Every one that comes to Europe has got to pass through. You don't mean it in that sense so much? You mean what good it does you? Well, how can you penetrate futurity? How can you tell what lies ahead? If it's a pleasant road I don't care where it leads. I like the road, Miss Archer; I like the dear old asphalte. You can't get tired of it—you can't if you try. You think you would, but you wouldn't; there's always something new and fresh. Take the Hôtel Drouot, now; they sometimes have three and four sales a week. Where can you get such things as you can here? In spite of all they say, I maintain they are cheaper too, if you know the right places. I know plenty of places, but I keep them to myself. I'll tell you, if you like, as a particular favour; only you must not tell any one else. Don't you go anywhere without asking me first; I want you to promise me that. As a general thing avoid the Boulevards; there is very little to be done on the Boulevards. Speaking conscientiously—*sans blague*—I don't believe any one knows Paris better than I. You and Mrs. Touchett must come and breakfast with me some day, and I'll show you my things; *je ne vous dis que ca!* There has been a great deal of talk about London of late; it's the fashion to cry up London. But there is nothing in it—you can't do anything in London. No Louis Quinze—nothing of the First Empire; nothing but their eternal Queen Anne. It's good for one's bed-room, Queen Anne—for one's washing-room; but it isn't proper for a *salon*. Do I spend my life at the auctioneer's?" Mr. Rosier pursued, in answer to another question of Isabel's. "Oh, no; I haven't the means. I wish I had. You think I'm a mere trifler; I can tell by the expression of your face—you have got a wonderfully expressive face. I hope you don't mind my saying that; I mean it as a kind of warning. You think I ought to do something, and so do I, so long as you leave it vague. But when you come to the point, you see you have to stop. I can't go home and be a shopkeeper. You think I am very well fitted? Ah, Miss Archer, you overrate me. I can buy very well, but I can't sell; you should see when I sometimes try to get rid of my things. It takes much more ability to make other people buy than to buy yourself. When

I think how clever they must be, the people who make *me* buy! Ah, no; I couldn't be a shopkeeper. I can't be a doctor, it's a repulsive business. I can't be a clergyman, I haven't got convictions. And then I can't pronounce the names right in the Bible. They are very difficult, in the Old Testament particularly. I can't be a lawyer; I don't understand—how do you call it?—the American *procédure*. Is there anything else? There is nothing for a gentleman to do in America. I should like to be a diplomatist; but American diplomacy—that is not for gentlemen either. I am sure if you had seen the last min——"

Henrietta Stackpole, who was often with her friend when Mr. Rosier, coming to pay his compliments, late in the afternoon, expressed himself after the fashion I have sketched, usually interrupted the young man at this point and read him a lecture on the duties of the American citizen. She thought him most unnatural; he was worse than Mr. Ralph Touchett. Henrietta, however, was at this time more than ever addicted to fine criticism, for her conscience had been freshly alarmed as regards Isabel. She had not congratulated this young lady on her accession of fortune, and begged to be excused from doing so.

"If Mr. Touchett had consulted me about leaving you the money," she frankly said, "I would have said to him, 'Never.'"

"I see," Isabel had answered. "You think it will prove a curse in disguise. Perhaps it will."

"Leave it to some one you care less for—that's what I should have said."

"To yourself, for instance?" Isabel suggested, jocosely, And then—"Do you really believe it will ruin me?" she asked, in quite another tone.

"I hope it won't ruin you; but it will certainly confirm your dangerous tendencies."

"Do you mean the love of luxury—of extravagance?"

"No, no," said Henrietta; "I mean your moral tendencies. I approve of luxury; I think we ought to be as elegant as possible. Look at the luxury of our western cities; I have seen nothing over here to compare with it. I hope you will never become sensual; but I am not afraid of that. The

peril for you is that you live too much in the world of your own dreams—you are not enough in contact with reality—with the toiling, striving, suffering, I may even say sinning, world that surrounds you. You are too fastidious; you have too many graceful illusions. Your newly-acquired thousands will shut you up more and more to the society of a few selfish and heartless people, who will be interested in keeping up those illusions."

Isabel's eyes expanded as she gazed upon this vivid but dusky picture of her future. "What are my illusions?" she asked. "I try so hard not to have any."

"Well," said Henrietta, "you think that you can lead a romantic life, that you can live by pleasing yourself and pleasing others. You will find you are mistaken. Whatever life you lead, you must put your soul into it—to make any sort of success of it; and from the moment you do that it ceases to be romance, I assure you; it becomes reality! And you can't always please yourself; you must sometimes please other people. That, I admit, you are very ready to do; but there is another thing that is still more important—you must often *dis*please others. You must always be ready for that—you must never shrink from it. That doesn't suit you at all—you are too fond of admiration, you like to be thought well of. You think we can escape disagreeable duties by taking romantic views—that is your great illusion, my dear. But we can't. You must be prepared on many occasions in life to please no one at all—not even yourself."

Isabel shook her head sadly; she looked troubled and frightened. "This, for you, Henrietta," she said, "must be one of those occasions!"

It was certainly true that Miss Stackpole, during her visit to Paris, which had been professionally more remunerative than her English sojourn, had not been living in the world of dreams. Mr. Bantling, who had now returned to England, was her companion for the first four weeks of her stay; and about Mr. Bantling there was nothing dreamy. Isabel learned from her friend that the two had led a life of great intimacy, and that this had been a peculiar advantage to Henrietta, owing to the gentleman's remarkable knowledge of Paris. He had explained everything, shown

her everything, been her constant guide and interpreter. They had breakfasted together, dined together, gone to the theatre together, supped together, really in a manner quite lived together. He was a true friend, Henrietta more than once assured our heroine; and she had never supposed that she could like any Englishman so well. Isabel could not have told you why, but she found something that ministered to mirth in the alliance the correspondent of the *Interviewer* had struck with Lady Pensil's brother; and her amusement subsisted in the face of the fact that she thought it a credit to each of them. Isabel could not rid herself of a suspicion that they were playing, somehow, at cross-purposes—that the simplicity of each of them had been entrapped. But this simplicity was none the less honourable on either side; it was as graceful on Henrietta's part to believe that Mr. Bantling took an interest in the diffusion of lively journalism, and in consolidating the position of lady-correspondents, as it was on the part of her companion to suppose that the cause of the *Interviewer*—a periodical of which he never formed a very definite conception—was, if subtly analysed (a task to which Mr. Bantling felt himself quite equal), but the cause of Miss Stackpole's coquetry. Each of these harmless confederates supplied at any rate a want of which the other was somewhat eagerly conscious. Mr. Bantling, who was of a rather slow and discursive habit, relished a prompt, keen, positive woman, who charmed him with the spectacle of a brilliant eye and a kind of bandbox neatness, and who kindled a perception of raciness in a mind to which the usual fare of life seemed unsalted. Henrietta, on the other hand, enjoyed the society of a fresh-looking, professionless gentleman, whose leisured state, though generally indefensible, was a decided advantage to Miss Stackpole, and who was furnished with an easy, traditional, though by no means exhaustive, answer to almost any social or practical question that could come up. She often found Mr. Bantling's answers very convenient, and in the press of catching the American post would make use of them in her correspondence. It was to be feared that she was indeed drifting toward those mysterious shallows as to which Isabel, wishing for a good-humoured retort, had warned her. There might be danger in

store for Isabel; but it was scarcely to be hoped that Miss Stackpole, on her side, would find permanent safety in the adoption of second-hand views. Isabel continued to warn her, good-humouredly; Lady Pensil's obliging brother was sometimes, on our heroine's lips, an object of irreverent and facetious allusion. Nothing, however, could exceed Henrietta's amiability on this point; she used to abound in the sense of Isabel's irony, and to enumerate with elation the hours she had spent with the good Mr. Bantling. Then, a few moments later, she would forget that they had been talking jocosely, and would mention with impulsive earnestness some expedition she had made in the company of the gallant ex-guardsman. She would say—"Oh, I know all about Versailles; I went there with Mr. Bantling. I was bound to see it thoroughly—I warned him when we went out there that I was thorough; so we spent three days at the hotel and wandered all over the place. It was lovely weather—a kind of Indian summer, only not so good. We just lived in that park. Oh yes; you can't tell me anything about Versailles." Henrietta appeared to have made arrangements to meet Mr. Bantling in the spring, in Italy.

CHAPTER XXI

MRS. TOUCHETT, before arriving in Paris, had fixed the day for her departure; and by the middle of February she had begun to travel southward. She did not go directly to Florence, but interrupted her journey to pay a visit to her son, who at San Remo, on the Italian shore of the Mediterranean, had been spending a dull, bright winter, under a while umbrella. Isabel went with her aunt, as a matter of course, though Mrs. Touchett, with her usual homely logic, had laid before her a pair of alternatives.

"Now, of course, you are completely your own mistress," she said. "Excuse me; I don't mean that you were not so before. But you are on a different footing—property erects a kind of barrier. You can do a great many things if you are rich, which would be severely criticised if you were poor. You can go and come, you can travel alone, you can have your own establishment: I mean of course if you will take a companion—some decayed gentlewoman with a darned cashmere and dyed hair, who paints on velvet. You don't think you would like that? Of course you can do as you please; I only want you to understand that you are at liberty. You might take Miss Stackpole as your *dame de compagnie;* she would keep people off very well. I think, however, that it is a great deal better you should remain with me, in spite of there being no obligation. It's better for several reasons, quite apart from your liking it. I shouldn't think you would like it, but I recommend you to make the sacrifice. Of course whatever novelty there may have been at first in my society has quite passed away, and you see me as I am—a dull, obstinate, narrow-minded old woman."

"I don't think you are at all dull," Isabel had replied to this.

"But you do think I am obstinate and narrow-minded? I told you so!" said Mrs. Touchett, with much elation at being justified.

Isabel remained for the present with her aunt, because, in spite of eccentric impulses, she had a great regard for what was usually deemed decent, and a young gentlewoman without visible relations had always struck her as a flower without foliage. It was true that Mrs. Touchett's conversation had never again appeared so brilliant as that first afternoon in Albany, when she sat in her damp waterproof and sketched the opportunities that Europe would offer to a young person of taste. This, however, was in a great measure the girl's own fault; she had got a glimpse of her aunt's experience, and her imagination constantly anticipated the judgments and emotions of a woman who had very little of the same faculty. Apart from this, Mrs. Touchett had a great merit; she was as honest as a pair of compasses. There was a comfort in her stiffness and firmness; you knew exactly where to find her, and were never liable to chance encounters with her. On her own ground she was always to be found; but she was never over-inquisitive as regards the territory of her neighbour. Isabel came at last to have a kind of undemonstrable pity for her; there seemed something so dreary in the condition of a person whose nature had, as it were, so little surface—offered so limited a face to the accretions of human contact. Nothing tender, nothing sympathetic, had ever had a chance to fasten upon it—no wind-sown blossom, no familiar moss. Her passive extent, in other words, was about that of a knife-edge. Isabel had reason to believe, however, that as she advanced in life she grew more disposed to confer those sentimental favours which she was still unable to accept—to sacrifice consistency to considerations of that inferior order for which the excuse must be found in the particular case. It was not to the credit of her absolute rectitude that she should have gone the longest way round to Florence, in order to spend a few weeks with her invalid son; for in former years it had been one of her most definite convictions that when Ralph wished to see her he was at liberty to remember that the Palazzo Crescentini contained a spacious apartment which was known as the room of the signorina.

"I want to ask you something," Isabel said to this young man, the day after her arrival at San Remo—"something

that I have thought more than once of asking you by letter, but that I have hesitated on the whole to write about. Face to face, nevertheless, my question seems easy enough. Did you know that your father intended to leave me so much money?"

Ralph stretched his legs a little further than usual, and gazed a little more fixedly at the Mediterranean. "What does it matter, my dear Isabel, whether I knew? My father was very obstinate."

"So," said the girl, "you did know."

"Yes; he told me. We even talked it over a little."

"What did he do it for?" asked Isabel abruptly.

"Why, as a kind of souvenir."

"He liked me too much," said Isabel.

"That's a way we all have."

"If I believed that, I should be very unhappy. Fortunately I don't believe it. I want to be treated with justice; I want nothing but that."

"Very good. But you must remember that justice to a lovely being is after all a florid sort of sentiment."

"I am not a lovely being. How can you say that, at the very moment when I am asking such odious questions? I must seem to you delicate."

"You seem to me troubled," said Ralph.

"I am troubled."

"About what?"

For a moment she answered nothing; then she broke out—

"Do you think it good for me suddenly to be made so rich? Henrietta doesn't."

"Oh, hang Henrietta!" said Ralph, coarsely. "If you ask me, I am delighted at it."

"Is that why your father did it—for your amusement?"

"I differ with Miss Stackpole," Ralph said, more gravely. "I think it's very good for you to have means."

Isabel looked at him a moment with serious eyes. "I wonder whether you know what is good for me—or whether you care."

"If I know, depend upon it I care. Shall I tell you what it is? Not to torment yourself."

"Not to torment you, I suppose you mean."

"You can't do that; I am proof. Take things more easily. Don't ask yourself so much whether this or that is good for you. Don't question your conscience so much —it will get out of tune, like a strummed piano. Keep it for great occasions. Don't try so much to form your character—it's like trying to pull open a rosebud. Live as you like best, and your character will form itself. Most things are good for you; the exceptions are very rare, and a comfortable income is not one of them." Ralph paused, smiling; Isabel had listened quickly. "You have too much conscience," Ralph added. "It's out of all reason, the number of things you think wrong. Spread your wings; rise above the ground. It's never wrong to do that."

She had listened eagerly, as I say; and it was her nature to understand quickly.

"I wonder if you appreciate what you say. If you do, you take a great responsibility."

"You frighten me a little, but I think I am right," said Ralph, continuing to smile.

"All the same, what you say is very true," Isabel went on. "You could say nothing more true. I am absorbed in myself—I look at life too much as a doctor's prescription. Why, indeed, should we perpetually be thinking whether things are good for us, as if we were patients lying in a hospital? Why should I be so afraid of not doing right? As if it mattered to the world whether I do right or wrong!"

"You are a capital person to advise," said Ralph; "you take the wind out of *my* sails!"

She looked at him as if she had not heard him—though she was following out the train of reflection which he himself had kindled. "I try to care more about the world than about myself—but I always come back to myself. It's because I am afraid." She stopped; her voice had trembled a little. "Yes, I am afraid; I can't tell you. A large fortune means freedom, and I am afraid of that. It's such a fine thing, and one should make such a good use of it. If one shouldn't, one would be ashamed. And one must always be thinking—it's a constant effort. I am not sure that it's not a greater happiness to be powerless."

"For weak people I have no doubt it's a greater happiness. For weak people the effort not to be contemptible must be great."

"And how do you know I am not weak?" Isabel asked.

"Ah," Ralph answered, with a blush which the girl noticed, "if you are, I am awfully sold!"

The charm of the Mediterranean coast only deepened for our heroine on acquaintance; for it was the threshold of Italy—the gate of admirations. Italy, as yet imperfectly seen and felt, stretched before her as a land of promise, a land in which a love of the beautiful might be comforted by endless knowledge. Whenever she strolled upon the shore with her cousin—and she was the companion of his daily walk—she looked a while across the sea, with longing eyes, to where she knew that Genoa lay. She was glad to pause, however, on the edge of this larger knowledge; the stillness of these soft weeks seemed good to her. They were a peaceful interlude in a career which she had little warrant as yet for regarding as agitated, but which nevertheless she was constantly picturing to herself by the light of her hopes, her fears, her fancies, her ambitions, her predilections, and which reflected these subjective accidents in a manner sufficiently dramatic. Madame Merle had predicted to Mrs. Touchett that after Isabel had put her hand into her pocket half-a-dozen times she would be reconciled to the idea that it had been filled by a munificent uncle; and the event justified, as it had so often justified before, Madame Merle's perspicacity. Ralph Touchett had praised his cousin for being morally inflammable; that is, for being quick to take a hint that was meant as good advice. His advice had perhaps helped the matter; at any rate before she left San Remo she had grown used to feeling rich. The consciousness found a place in rather a dense little group of ideas that she had about her herself, and often it was by no means the least agreeable. It was a perpetual implication of good intentions. She lost herself in a maze of visions; the fine things a rich, independent, generous girl, who took a large, human view of her opportunities and obligations, might do, were really innumerable. Her fortune therefore became to her mind a part of her better

self; it gave her importance, gave her even, to her own imagination, a certain ideal beauty. What it did for her in the imagination of others is another affair, and on this point we must also touch in time. The visions I have just spoken of were intermingled with other reveries. Isabel liked better to think of the future than of the past; but at times, as she listened to the murmur of the Mediterranean waves, her glance took a backward flight. It rested upon two figures which, in spite of increasing distance, were still sufficiently salient; they were recognisable without difficulty as those of Caspar Goodwood and Lord Warburton. It was strange how quickly these gentlemen had fallen into the background of our young lady's life. It was in her disposition at all times to lose faith in the reality of absent things; she could summon back her faith, in case of need, with an effort, but the effort was often painful, even when the reality had been pleasant. The past was apt to look dead, and its revival to wear the supernatural aspect of a resurrection. Isabel moreover was not prone to take for granted that she herself lived in the mind of others—she had not the fatuity to believe that she left indelible traces. She was capable of being wounded by the discovery that she had been forgotten; and yet, of all liberties, the one she herself found sweetest was the liberty to forget. She had not given her last shilling, sentimentally speaking, either to Caspar Goodwood or to Lord Warburton, and yet she did not regard them as appreciably in her debt. She had, of course, reminded herself that she was to hear from Mr. Goodwood again; but this was not to be for another year and a half, and in that time a great many things might happen. Isabel did not say to herself that her American suitor might find some other girl more comfortable to woo; because, though it was certain that many other girls would prove so, she had not the smallest belief that this merit would attract him. But she reflected that she herself might change her humour—might weary of those things that were not Caspar (and there were so many things that were not Caspar!), and might find satisfaction in the very qualities which struck her to-day as his limitations. It was conceivable

that his limitations should some day prove a sort of blessing in disguise—a clear and quiet harbour, inclosed by a fine granite breakwater. But that day could only come in its order, and she could not wait for it with folded hands. That Lord Warburton should continue to cherish her image seemed to her more than modesty should not only expect, but even desire. She had so definitely undertaken to forget him, as a lover, that a corresponding effort on his part would be eminently proper. This was not, as it may seem, merely a theory tinged with sarcasm. Isabel really believed that his lordship would, in the usual phrase, get over it. He had been deeply smitten—this she believed, and she was still capable of deriving pleasure from the belief; but it was absurd that a man so completely absolved from fidelity should stiffen himself in an attitude it would be more graceful to discontinue. Englishmen liked to be comfortable, said Isabel, and there could be little comfort for Lord Warburton, in the long run, in thinking of a self-sufficient American girl who had been but a casual acquaintance. Isabel flattered herself that should she hear, from one day to another, that he had married some young lady of his own country who had done more to deserve him, she should receive the news without an impulse of jealousy. It would have proved that he believed she was firm—which was what she wished to seem to him; and this was grateful to her pride.

CHAPTER XXII

ON one of the first days of May, some six months after old Mr. Touchett's death, a picturesque little group was gathered in one of the many rooms of an ancient villa which stood on the summit of an olive-muffled hill, outside of the Roman gate of Florence. The villa was a long, rather blank-looking structure, with the far-projecting roof which Tuscany loves, and which, on the hills that encircle Florence, when looked at from a distance, makes so harmonious a rectangle with the straight, dark, definite cypresses that usually rise, in groups of three or four, beside it. The house had a front upon a little grassy, empty, rural piazza which occupied a part of the hill-top; and this front, pierced with a few windows in irregular relations and furnished with a stone bench which ran along the base of the structure and usually afforded a lounging-place to one or two persons wearing more or less of that air of under-valued merit which in Italy, for some reason or other, always gracefully invests any one who confidently assumes a perfectly passive attitude—this ancient, solid, weather-worn, yet imposing front, had a somewhat incommunicative character. It was the mask of the house; it was not its face. It had heavy lids, but no eyes; the house in reality looked another way—looked off behind, into splendid openness and the range of the afternoon light. In that quarter the villa overhung the slope of its hill and the long valley of the Arno, hazy with Italian colour. It had a narrow garden, in the manner of a terrace, productive chiefly of tangles of wild roses and old stone benches, mossy and sun-warmed. The parapet of the terrace was just the height to lean upon, and beneath it the ground declined into the vagueness of olive-crops and vineyards. It is not, however, with the outside of the place that we are concerned; on this bright morning of ripened spring its tenants had reason to prefer the shady side of the wall. The windows of the ground-floor, as you saw them from the

piazza, were, in their noble proportions, extremely architectural; but their function seemed to be less to offer communication with the world than to defy the world to look in. They were massively cross-barred and placed at such a height that curiosity, even on tiptoe, expired before it reached them. In an apartment lighted by a row of three of these obstructive apertures—one of the several distinct apartments into which the villa was divided, and which were mainly occupied by foreigners of conflicting nationality long resident in Florence—a gentleman was seated, in company with a young girl and two good sisters from a religious house. The room was, however, much less gloomy than my indications may have represented, for it had a wide, high door, which now stood open into the tangled garden behind; and the tall iron lattices admitted on occasion more than enough of the Italian sunshine. The place, moreover, was almost luxuriously comfortable; it told of habitation being practised as a fine art. It contained a variety of those faded hangings of damask and tapestry, those chests and cabinets of carved and time-polished oak, those primitive specimens of pictorial art in frames pedantically rusty, those perverse-looking relics of mediæval brass and pottery, of which Italy has long been the not quite exhausted storehouse. These things were intermingled with articles of modern furniture, in which liberal concession had been made to cultivated sensibilities; it was to be noticed that all the chairs were deep and well padded, and that much space was occupied by a writing-table of which the ingenious perfection bore the stamp of London and the nineteenth century. There were books in profusion, and magazines and newspapers, and a few small modern pictures, chiefly in water-colour. One of these productions stood on a drawing-room easel, before which, at the moment when we begin to be concerned with her, the young girl I have mentioned had placed herself. She was looking at the picture in silence.

Silence—absolute silence—had not fallen upon her companions; but their conversation had an appearance of embarrassed continuity. The two good sisters had not settled themselves in their respective chairs; their attitude was noticeably provisional, and they evidently wished to emphasise

the transitory character of their presence. They were plain, comfortable mild-faced women, with a kind of business-like modesty, to which the impersonal aspect of their stiffened linen and inexpressive serge gave an advantage. One of them, a person of a certain age, in spectacles, with a fresh complexion and a full cheek, had a more discriminating manner than her colleague, and had evidently the responsibility of their errand, which apparently related to the young girl.

This young lady wore her hat—a coiffure of extreme simplicity, which was not at variance with a plain muslin gown, too short for the wearer, though it must already have been "let out." The gentleman who might have been supposed to be entertaining the two nuns was perhaps conscious of the difficulties of his function; to entertain a nun is, in fact, a sufficiently delicate operation. At the same time he was plainly much interested in his youthful companion, and while she turned her back to him his eyes rested gravely upon her slim, small figure. He was a man of forty, with a well-shaped head, upon which the hair, still dense, but prematurely grizzled, had been cropped close. He had a thin, delicate, sharply-cut face, of which the only fault was that it looked too pointed; an appearance to which the shape of his beard contributed not a little. This beard, cut in the manner of the portraits of the sixteenth century and surmounted by a fair moustache, of which the ends had a picturesque upward flourish, gave its wearer a somewhat foreign, traditionary look, and suggested that he was a gentleman who studied effect. His luminous intelligent eye, an eye which expressed both softness and keenness—the nature of the observer as well as of the dreamer—would have assured you, however, that he studied it only within well-chosen limits, and that in so far as he sought it he found it. You would have been much at a loss to determine his nationality; he had none of the superficial signs that usually render the answer to this question an insipidly easy one. If he had English blood in his veins, it had probably received some French or Italian commixture; he was one of those persons who, in the matter of race, may, as the phrase is, pass for anything. He had a light, lean, lazy-looking figure,

and was apparently neither tall nor short. He was dressed as a man dresses who takes little trouble about it.

"Well, my dear, what do you think of it?" he asked of the young girl. He used the Italian tongue, and used it with perfect ease; but this would not have convinced you that he was an Italian.

The girl turned her head a little to one side and the other.

"It is very pretty, papa. Did you make it yourself?"

"Yes, my child; I made it. Don't you think I am clever?"

"Yes, papa, very clever; I also have learned to make pictures." And she turned round and showed a small, fair face, of which the natural and usual expression seemed to be a smile of perfect sweetness.

"You should have brought me a specimen of your powers."

"I have brought a great many; they are in my trunk," said the child.

"She draws very—very carefully," the elder of the nuns remarked, speaking in French.

"I am glad to hear it. Is it you who have instructed her?"

"Happily, no," said the good sister, blushing a little. *"Ce n'est pas ma partie.* I teach nothing; I leave that to those who are wiser. We have an excellent drawing-master, Mr.—Mr.—what is his name?" she asked of her companion.

Her companion looked about at the carpet.

"It's a German name," she said in Italian, as if it needed to be translated.

"Yes," the other went on, "he is a German, and we have had him for many years."

The young girl, who was not heeding the conversation, had wandered away to the open door of the large room, and stood looking into the garden.

"And you, my sister, are French," said the gentleman.

"Yes, sir," the woman replied, gently. "I speak to the pupils in my own language. I know no other. But we have sisters of other countries—English, German, Irish. They all speak their own tongue."

The gentleman gave a smile.

"Has my daughter been under the care of one of the Irish ladies?" And then, as he saw that his visitors suspected a

joke, but failed to understand it—"You are very complete," he said, instantly.

"Oh, yes, we are complete. We have everything, and everything is of the best."

"We have gymnastics," the Italian sister ventured to remark. "But not dangerous."

"I hope not. Is that your branch?" A question which provoked much candid hilarity on the part of the two ladies; on the subsidence of which their entertainer, glancing at his daughter, remarked that she had grown.

"Yes, but I think she has finished. She will remain little," said the French sister.

"I am not sorry. I like little women," the gentleman declared, frankly. "But I know no particular reason why my child should be short."

The nun gave a temperate shrug, as if to intimate that such things might be beyond our knowledge.

"She is in very good health; that is the best thing."

"Yes, she looks well." And the young girl's father watched her for a moment. "What do you see in the garden?" he asked, in French.

"I see many flowers," she replied, in a sweet, small voice, and with a French accent as good as his own.

"Yes, but not many good ones. However, such as they are, go out and gather some for *ces dames.*"

The child turned to him, with her smile brightened by pleasure. "May I, truly?" she asked.

"Ah, when I tell you," said her father.

The girl glanced at the elder of the nuns.

"May I, truly, *ma mère?*"

"Obey monsieur your father, my child," said the sister, blushing again.

The child, satisfied with this authorisation, descended from the threshold, and was presently lost to sight.

"You don't spoil them," said her father, smiling.

"For everything they must ask leave. That is our system. Leave is freely granted, but they must ask it."

"Oh, I don't quarrel with your system; I have no doubt it is a very good one. I sent you my daughter to see what you would make of her. I had faith."

"One must have faith," the sister blandly rejoined, gazing through her spectacles.

"Well, has my faith been rewarded? What have you made of her?"

The sister dropped her eyes a moment.

"A good Christian, monsieur."

Her host dropped his eyes as well; but it was probable that the movement had in each case a different spring.

"Yes," he said in a moment, "and what else?"

He watched the lady from the convent, probably thinking that she would say that a good Christian was everything.

But for all her simplicity, she was not so crude as that. "A charming young lady—a real little woman—a daughter in whom you will have nothing but contentment."

"She seems to me very nice," said the father. "She is very pretty."

"She is perfect. She has no faults."

"She never had any as a child, and I am glad you have given her none."

"We love her too much," said the spectacled sister, with dignity. "And as for faults, how can we give what we have not? *Le couvent n'est pas comme le monde, monsieur.* She is our child, as you may say. We have had her since she was so small."

"Of all those we shall lose this year she is the one we shall miss most," the younger woman murmured, deferentially.

"Ah, yes, we shall talk long of her," said the other. "We shall hold her up to the new ones."

And at this the good sister appeared to find her spectacles dim; while her companion, after fumbling a moment, presently drew forth a pocket-handkerchief of durable texture.

"It is not certain that you will lose her; nothing is settled yet," the host rejoined, quickly; not as if to anticipate their tears, but in the tone of a man saying what was most agreeable to himself.

"We should be very happy to believe that. Fifteen is very young to leave us."

"Oh," exclaimed the gentleman, with more vivacity than he had yet used, "it is not I who wish to take her away. I wish you could keep her always!"

"Ah, monsieur," said the elder sister, smiling and getting up, "good as she is, she is made for the world. *Le monde y gagnera.*"

"If all the good people were hidden away in convents, how would the world get on?" her companion softly inquired, rising also.

This was a question of a wider bearing than the good woman apparently supposed; and the lady in spectacles took a harmonising view by saying comfortably—

"Fortunately there are good people everywhere."

"If you are going there will be two less here," her host remarked, gallantly.

For this extravagant sally his simple visitors had no answer, and they simply looked at each other in decent deprecation; but their confusion was speedily covered by the return of the young girl, with two large bunches of roses—one of them all white, the other red.

"I give you your choice, mamman Catherine," said the child. "It is only the colour that is different, mamman Justine; there are just as many roses in one bunch as another."

The two sisters turned to each other, smiling and hesitating, with—"Which will you take?" and "No, it's for you to choose."

"I will take the red," said mother Catherine, in the spectacles. "I am so red myself. They will comfort us on our way back to Rome."

"Ah, they won't last," cried the young girl. "I wish I could give you something that would last!"

"You have given us a good memory of yourself, my daughter. That will last!"

"I wish nuns could wear pretty things. I would give you my blue beads," the child went on.

"And do you go back to Rome to-night?" her father asked.

"Yes, we take the train again. We have so much to do *là-bas.*"

"Are you not tired?"

"We are never tired."

"Ah, my sister, sometimes," murmured the junior votaress.

"Not to-day, at any rate. We have rested too well here. *Que Dieu vous garde, ma fille.*"

Their host, while they exchanged kisses with his daughter, went forward to open the door through which they were to pass; but as he did so he gave a slight exclamation, and stood looking beyond. The door opened into a vaulted ante-chamber, as high as a chapel, and paved with red tiles; and into this ante-chamber a lady had just been admitted by a servant, a lad in shabby livery, who was now ushering her toward the apartment in which our friends were grouped. The gentleman at the door, after dropping his exclamation, remained silent; in silence, too, the lady advanced. He gave her no further audible greeting, and offered her no hand, but stood aside to let her pass into the drawing-room. At the threshold she hesitated.

"Is there any one?" she asked.

"Some one you may see."

She went in, and found herself confronted with the two nuns and their pupil, who was coming forward between them, with a hand in the arm of each. At the sight of the new visitor they all paused, and the lady, who had stopped too, stood looking at them. The young girl gave a little soft cry—

"Ah, Madame Merle!"

The visitor had been slightly startled; but her manner the next instant was none the less gracious.

"Yes, it's Madame Merle, come to welcome you home."

And she held out two hands to the girl, who immediately came up to her, presenting her forehead to be kissed. Madame Merle saluted this portion of her charming little person, and then stood smiling at the two nuns. They acknowledged her smile with a decent obeisance, but permitted themselves no direct scrutiny of this imposing, brilliant woman, who seemed to bring in with her something of the radiance of the outer world.

"These ladies have brought my daughter home, and now they return to the convent," the gentleman explained.

"Ah, you go back to Rome? I have lately come from there. It is very lovely now," said Madame Merle.

The good sisters, standing with their hands folded into their sleeves, accepted this statement uncritically; and the master of the house asked Madame Merle how long it was since she had left Rome.

"She came to see me at the convent," said the young girl, before her father's visitors had time to reply.

"I have been more than once, Pansy," Madame Merle answered. "Am I not your great friend in Rome?"

"I remember the last time best," said Pansy, "because you told me I should leave the place."

"Did you tell her that?" the child's father asked.

"I hardly remember. I told her what I thought would please her. I have been in Florence a week. I hoped you would come and see me."

"I should have done so if I had known you were here. One doesn't know such things by inspiration—though I suppose one ought. You had better sit down."

These two speeches were made in a peculiar tone of voice —a tone half-lowered, and carefully quiet, but as from habit rather than from any definite need.

Madame Merle looked about her, choosing her seat.

"You are going to the door with these women? Let me of course not interrupt the ceremony. *Je vous salue, mesdames,*" she added, in French, to the nuns, as if to dismiss them.

"This lady is a great friend of ours; you will have seen her at the convent," said the host. "We have much faith in her judgment, and she will help me to decide whether my daughter shall return to you at the end of the holidays."

"I hope you will decide in our favour, madam," the sister in spectacles ventured to remark.

"That is Mr. Osmond's pleasantry; I decide nothing," said Madame Merle, smiling still. "I believe you have a very good school, but Miss Osmond's friends must remember that she is meant for the world."

"That is what I have told monsieur," sister Catherine answered. "It is precisely to fit her for the world," she murmured, glancing at Pansy, who stood at a little distance looking at Madame Merle's elegant apparel.

"Do you hear that, Pansy? You are meant for the world," said Pansy's father.

The child gazed at him an instant with her pure young eyes.

"Am I not meant for you, papa?" she asked.

Papa gave a quick, light laugh.

"That doesn't prevent it! I am of the world, Pansy."

"Kindly permit us to retire," said sister Catherine. "Be good, in any case, my daughter."

"I shall certainly come back and see you," Pansy declared, recommencing her embraces, which were presently interrupted by Madame Merle.

"Stay with me, my child," she said, "while your father takes the good ladies to the door."

Pansy stared, disappointed, but not protesting. She was evidently impregnated with the idea of submission, which was due to any one who took the tone of authority; and she was a passive spectator of the operation of her fate.

"May I not see mamman Catherine get into the carriage?" she asked very gently.

"It would please me better if you would remain with me," said Madame Merle, while Mr. Osmond and his companions, who had bowed low again to the other visitor, passed into the ante-chamber.

"Oh yes, I will stay," Pansy answered; and she stood near Madame Merle, surrendering her little hand, which this lady took. She stared out of the window; her eyes had filled with tears.

"I am glad they have taught you to obey," said Madame Merle. "That is what little girls should do."

"Oh yes, I obey very well," said Pansy, with soft eagerness, almost with boastfulness, as if she had been speaking of her piano-playing. And then she gave a faint, just audible sigh.

Madame Merle, holding her hand, drew it across her own fine palm and looked at it. The gaze was critical, but it found nothing to deprecate; the child's small hand was delicate and fair.

"I hope they always see that you wear gloves," she said in a moment. "Little girls usually dislike them."

"I used to dislike them, but I like them now," the child answered.

"Very good, I will make you a present of a dozen."

"I thank you very much. What colours will they be?" Pansy demanded, with interest.

Madame Merle meditated a moment.

"Useful colours."

"But will they be pretty?"

"Are you fond of pretty things?"

"Yes; but—not too fond," said Pansy, with a trace of asceticism.

"Well, they will not be too pretty," Madame Merle answered, with a laugh. She took the child's other hand, and drew her nearer; and then, looking at her a moment—"Shall you miss mother Catherine?"

"Yes—when I think of her."

"Try, then, not to think of her. Perhaps some day," added Madame Merle, "you will have another mother."

"I don't think that is necessary," Pansy said, repeating her little soft, conciliatory sigh. "I had more than thirty mothers at the convent."

Her father's step sounded again in the ante-chamber, and Madame Merle got up, releasing the child. Mr. Osmond came in and closed the door; then, without looking at Madame Merle, he pushed one or two chairs back into their places.

His visitor waited a moment for him to speak, watching him as he moved about. Then at last she said—"I hoped you would have come to Rome. I thought it possible you would have come to fetch Pansy away."

"That was a natural supposition; but I am afraid it is not the first time I have acted in defiance of your calculations."

"Yes," said Madame Merle, "I think you are very perverse."

Mr. Osmond busied himself for a moment in the room—there was plenty of space in it to move about—in the fashion of a man mechanically seeking pretexts for not giving an attention which may be embarrassing. Presently, however, he had exhausted his pretexts; there was nothing left for him—unless he took up a book—but to stand with his hands behind him, looking at Pansy. "Why didn't you come and see the last of mamman Catherine?" he asked of her abruptly, in French.

Pansy hesitated a moment, glancing at Madame Merle. "I asked her to stay with me," said this lady, who had seated herself again in another place.

"Ah, that was better," said Osmond. Then, at last, he dropped into a chair, and sat looking at Madame Merle; leaning forward a little, with his elbows on the edge of the arms and his hands interlocked.

"She is going to give me some gloves," said Pansy.

"You needn't tell that to every one, my dear," Madame Merle observed.

"You are very kind to her," said Osmond. "She is supposed to have everything she needs."

"I should think she had had enough of the nuns."

"If we are going to discuss that matter, she had better go out of the room."

"Let her stay," said Madame Merle. "We will talk of something else."

"If you like, I won't listen," Pansy suggested, with an appearance of candour which imposed conviction.

"You may listen, charming child, because you won't understand," her father replied. The child sat down deferentially, near the open door, within sight of the garden, into which she directed her innocent, wistful eyes; and Mr. Osmond went on, irrelevantly, addressing himself to his other companion. "You are looking particularly well."

"I think I always look the same," said Madame Merle.

"You always *are* the same. You don't vary. You are a wonderful woman."

"Yes, I think I am."

"You sometimes change your mind, however. You told me on your return from England that you would not leave Rome again for the present."

"I am pleased that you remember so well what I say. That was my intention. But I have come to Florence to meet some friends who have lately arrived, and as to whose movements I was at that time uncertain."

"That reason is characteristic. You are always doing something for your friends."

Madame Merle looked straight at her interlocutor, smiling. "It is less characteristic than your comment upon it—which is perfectly insincere. I don't, however, make a crime of that," she added, "because if you don't believe what you say there is no reason why you should. I don't ruin myself for my

friends: I don't deserve your praise. I care greatly for myself."

"Exactly; but yourself includes so many other selves—so much of everything. I never knew a person whose life touched so many other lives."

"What do you call one's life?" asked Madame Merle. "One's appearance, one's movements, one's engagements, one's society?"

"I call your life—your ambitions," said Osmond.

Madame Merle looked a moment at Pansy. "I wonder whether she understands that," she murmured.

"You see she can't stay with us!" And Pansy's father gave a rather joyless smile. "Go into the garden, *ma bonne,* and pluck a flower or two for Madame Merle," he went on, in French.

"That's just what I wanted to do," Pansy exclaimed, rising with promptness and noiselessly departing. Her father followed her to the open door, stood a moment watching her, and then came back, but remained standing, or rather strolling to and fro, as if to cultivate a sense of freedom which in another attitude might be wanting.

"My ambitions are principally for you," said Madame Merle, looking up at him with a certain nobleness of expression.

"That comes back to what I say. I am part of your life—I and a thousand others. You are not selfish—I can't admit that. If you were selfish, what should I be? What epithet would properly describe me?"

"You are indolent. For me that is your worst fault."

"I am afraid it is really my best."

"You don't care," said Madame Merle, gravely.

"No; I don't think I care much. What sort of a fault do you call that? My indolence, at any rate, was one of the reasons I didn't go to Rome. But it was only one of them."

"It is not of importance—to me at least—that you didn't go; though I should have been glad to see you. I am glad that you are not in Rome now—which you might be, would probably be, if you had gone there a month ago. There is something I should like you to do at present in Florence."

"Please remember my indolence," said Osmond.

"I will remember it; but I beg you to forget it. In that way you will have both the virtue and the reward. This is not a great labour, and it may prove a great pleasure. How long is it since you made a new acquaintance?"

"I don't think I have made any since I made yours."

"It is time you should make another, then. There is a friend of mine I want you to know."

Mr. Osmond, in his walk, had gone back to the open door again, and was looking at his daughter, as she moved about in the intense sunshine. "What good will it do me?" he asked, with a sort of genial crudity.

Madame Merle reflected a moment. "It will amuse you." There was nothing crude in this rejoinder; it had been thoroughly well considered.

"If you say that, I believe it," said Osmond, coming toward her. "There are some points in which my confidence in you is complete. I am perfectly aware, for instance, that you know good society from bad."

"Society is all bad."

"Excuse me. That isn't a common sort of wisdom. You have gained it in the right way—experimentally; you have compared an immense number of people with each other."

"Well, I invite you to profit by my knowledge."

"To profit? Are you very sure that I shall?"

"It's what I hope. It will depend upon yourself. If I could only induce you to make an effort!"

"Ah, there you are! I knew something tiresome was coming. What in the world—that is likely to turn up here—is worth an effort?"

Madame Merle flushed a little, and her eye betrayed vexation. "Don't be foolish, Osmond. There is no one knows better than you that there are many things worth an effort."

"Many things, I admit. But they are none of them probable things."

"It is the effort that makes them probable," said Madame Merle.

"There's something in that. Who is your friend?"

"The person I came to Florence to see. She is a niece of Mrs. Touchett, whom you will not have forgotten."

"A niece? The word niece suggests youth. I see what you are coming to."

"Yes, she is young—twenty-two years old. She is a great friend of mine. I met her for the first time in England, several months ago, and we took a great fancy to each other. I like her immensely, and I do what I don't do every day—I admire her. You will do the same."

"Not if I can help it."

"Precisely. But you won't be able to help it."

"Is she beautiful, clever, rich, splendid, universally intelligent and unprecedentedly virtuous? It is only on those conditions that I care to make her acquaintance. You know I asked you some time ago never to speak to me of any one who should not correspond to that description. I know plenty of dingy people; I don't want to know any more."

"Miss Archer is not dingy; she's as bright as the morning. She corresponds to your description; it is for that I wish you to know her. She fills all your requirements."

"More or less, of course."

"No; quite literally. She is beautiful, accomplished, generous, and for an American, well-born. She is also very clever and very amiable, and she has a handsome fortune."

Mr. Osmond listened to this in silence, appearing to turn it over in his mind, with his eyes on his informant. "What do you want to do with her?" he asked, at last.

"What you see. Put her in your way."

"Isn't she meant for something better than that?"

"I don't pretend to know what people are meant for," said Madame Merle. "I only know what I can do with them."

"I am sorry for Miss Archer!" Osmond declared.

Madame Merle got up. "If that is a beginning of interest in her, I take note of it."

The two stood there, face to face; she settled her mantilla, looking down at it as she did so.

"You are looking very well," Osmond repeated, still more irrelevantly than before. "You have got some idea. You are never as well as when you have got an idea; they are always becoming to you."

In the manner of these two persons, on first meeting on any occasion, and especially when they met in the presence of

others, there was something indirect and circumspect, which showed itself in glance and tone. They approached each other obliquely, as it were, and they addressed each other by implication. The effect of each appeared to be to intensify to an embarrassing degree the self-consciousness of the other. Madame Merle of course carried off such embarrassments better than her friend; but even Madame Merle had not on this occasion the manner she would have liked to have —the perfect self-possession she would have wished to exhibit to her host. The point I wish to make is, however, that at a certain moment the obstruction, whatever it was, always levelled itself, and left them more closely face to face than either of them ever was with any one else. That was what had happened now. They stood there, knowing each other well, and each of them on the whole willing to accept the satisfaction of knowing, as a compensation for the inconvenience—whatever it might be—of being known.

"I wish very much you were not so heartless," said Madame Merle, quietly. "It has always been against you, and it will be against you now."

"I am not so heartless as you think. Every now and then something touches me—as for instance your saying just now that your ambitions are for me. I don't understand it; I don't see how or why they should be. But it touches me, all the same."

"You will probably understand it even less as time goes on. There are some things you will never understand. There is no particular need that you should."

"You, after all, are the most remarkable woman," said Osmond. "You have more in you than almost any one. I don't see why you think Mrs. Touchett's niece should matter very much to me, when—when——" and he paused a moment.

"When I myself have mattered so little?"

"That of course is not what I meant to say. When I have known and appreciated such a woman as you."

"Isabel Archer is better than I," said Madame Merle.

Her companion gave a laugh. "How little you must think of her to say that!"

"Do you suppose I am capable of jealousy? Please answer me that."

"With regard to me? No; on the whole I don't."

"Come and see me, then, two days hence. I am staying at Mrs. Touchett's—the Palazzo Crescentini—and the girl will be there."

"Why didn't you ask me that at first, simply, without speaking of the girl?" said Osmond. "You could have had her there at any rate."

Madame Merle looked at him in the manner of a woman whom no question that he could ask would find unprepared. "Do you wish to know why? Because I have spoken of you to her."

Osmond frowned and turned away. "I would rather not know that." Then, in a moment, he pointed out the easel supporting the little water-colour drawing. "Have you seen that —my last?"

Madame Merle drew near and looked at it a moment. "Is it the Venetian Alps—one of your last year's sketches?"

"Yes—but how you guess everything!"

Madame Merle looked for a moment longer; then she turned away. "You know I don't care for your drawings."

"I know it, yet I am always surprised at it. They are really so much better than most people's."

"That may very well be. But as the only thing you do, it's so little. I should have liked you to do so many other things: those were my ambitions."

"Yes; you have told me many times—things that were impossible."

"Things that were impossible," said Madame Merle. And then, in quite a different tone—"In itself your little picture is very good." She looked about the room—at the old cabinets, the pictures, the tapestries, the surfaces of faded silk. "Your rooms, at least, are perfect," she went on. "I am struck with that afresh, whenever I come back; I know none better anywhere. You understand this sort of thing as no one else does."

"I am very sick of it," said Osmond.

"You must let Miss Archer come and see all this. I have told her about it."

"I don't object to showing my things—when people are not idiots."

"You do it delightfully. As a cicerone in your own museum you appear to particular advantage."

Mr. Osmond, in return for this compliment, simply turned upon his companion an eye expressive of perfect clairvoyance.

"Did you say she was rich?" he asked in a moment.

"She has seventy thousand pounds."

"En écus bien comptés?"

"There is no doubt whatever about her fortune. I have seen it, as I may say."

"Satisfactory woman!—I mean you. And if I go to see her, shall I see the mother?"

"The mother? She has none—nor father either."

"The aunt then; whom did you say?—Mrs. Touchett."

"I can easily keep her out of the way."

"I don't object to her," said Osmond; "I rather like Mrs. Touchett. She has a sort of old-fashioned character that is passing away—a vivid identity. But that long jackanapes, the son—is he about the place?"

"He is there, but he won't trouble you."

"He's an awful ass."

"I think you are mistaken. He is a very clever man. But he is not fond of being about when I am there, because he doesn't like me."

"What could be more asinine than that? Did you say that she was pretty?" Osmond went on.

"Yes; but I won't say it again, lest you should be disappointed. Come and make a beginning; that is all I ask of you."

"A beginning of what?"

Madame Merle was silent a moment. "I want you of course to marry her."

"The beginning of the end! Well, I will see for myself. Have you told her that?"

"For what do you take me? She is a very delicate piece of machinery."

"Really," said Osmond, after some meditation, "I don't understand your ambitions."

"I think you will understand this one after you have seen Miss Archer. Suspend your judgment till then." Madame

Merle, as she spoke, had drawn near the open door of the garden, where she stood a moment, looking out. "Pansy has grown pretty," she presently added.

"So it seemed to me."

"But she has had enough of the convent."

"I don't know," said Osmond. "I like what they have made of her. It's very charming."

"That's not the convent. It's the child's nature."

"It's the combination, I think. She's as pure as a pearl."

"Why doesn't she come back with my flowers, then?" Madame Merle asked. "She is not in a hurry."

"We will go and get them," said her companion.

"She doesn't like me," murmured Madame Merle, as she raised her parasol, and they passed into the garden.

CHAPTER XXIII

MADAME MERLE, who had come to Florence on Mrs. Touchett's arrival at the invitation of this lady—Mrs. Touchett offering her for a month the hospitality of the Palazzo Crescentini—the judicious Madame Merle spoke to Isabel afresh about Gilbert Osmond, and expressed the wish that she should know him; but made no such point of the matter as we have seen her do in recommending the girl herself to Mr. Osmond's attention. The reason of this was perhaps that Isabel offered no resistance whatever to Madame Merle's proposal. In Italy, as in England, the lady had a multitude of friends, both among the natives of the country and its heterogeneous visitors. She had mentioned to Isabel most of the people the girl would find it well to know—of course, she said, Isabel could know whomever she would—and she had placed Mr. Osmond near the top of the list. He was an old friend of her own; she had known him these ten years; he was one of the cleverest and most agreeable men it was possible to meet. He was altogether above the respectable average; quite another affair. He was not perfect—far from it; the effect he produced depended a good deal on the state of his nerves and his spirits. If he were not in the right mood he could be very unsatisfactory—like most people, after all; but when he chose to exert himself no man could do it to better purpose. He had his peculiarities—which indeed Isabel would find to be the case with all the men really worth knowing—and he did not cause his light to shine equally for all persons. Madame Merle, however, thought she could undertake that for Isabel he would be brilliant. He was easily bored—too easily, and dull people always put him out; but a quick and cultivated girl like Isabel would give him a stimulus which was too absent from his life. At any rate, he was a person to know. One should not attempt to live in Italy without making a friend of Gilbert Osmond, who knew more about

the country than any one except two or three German professors. And if they had more knowledge than he, he had infinitely more taste; he had a taste which was quite by itself. Isabel remembered that her friend had spoken of him during their multifarious colloquies at Gardencourt, and wondered a little what was the nature of the tie that united them. She was inclined to imagine that Madame Merle's ties were peculiar, and such a possibility was a part of the interest created by this suggestive woman. As regards her relations with Mr. Osmond, however, Madame Merle hinted at nothing but a long-established and tranquil friendship. Isabel said that she should be happy to know a person who had enjoyed her friend's confidence for so many years. "You ought to see a great many men," Madame Merle remarked; "you ought to see as many as possible, so as to get used to them."

"Used to them?" Isabel repeated, with that exceedingly serious gaze which sometimes seemed to proclaim that she was deficient in a sense of humour—an intimation which at other moments she effectively refuted. "I am not afraid of them."

"Used to them. I mean, so as to despise them. That's what one comes to with most of them. You will pick out, for your society, the few whom you don't despise."

This remark had a bitterness which Madame Merle did not often allow herself to betray; but Isabel was not alarmed by it, for she had never supposed that, as one saw more of the world, the sentiment of respect became the most active of one's emotions. This sentiment was excited, however, by the beautiful city of Florence, which pleased her not less than Madame Merle had promised; and if her unassisted perception had not been able to gauge its charms, she had clever companions to call attention to latent merits. She was in no want, indeed, of æsthetic illumination, for Ralph found it a pleasure which renewed his own earlier sensations, to act as cicerone to his eager young kinswoman. Madame Merle remained at home; she had seen the treasures of Florence so often, and she had always something to do. But she talked of all things with remarkable vividness of memory—she remembered the right-hand angel in the large

Perugino, and the position of the hands of the Saint Elizabeth in the picture next to it; and had her own opinions as to the character of many famous works of art, differing often from Ralph with great sharpness, and defending her interpretations with as much ingenuity as good-humour. Isabel listened to the discussions which took place between the two, with a sense that she might derive much benefit from them and that they were among the advantages which —for instance—she could not have enjoyed in Albany. In the clear May mornings, before the formal breakfast—this repast at Mrs. Touchett's was served at twelve o'clock—Isabel wandered about with her cousin through the narrow and sombre Florentine streets, resting a while in the thicker dusk of some historic church, or the vaulted chambers of some dispeopled convent. She went to the galleries and palaces; she looked at the pictures and statues which had hitherto been great names to her, and exchanged for a knowledge which was sometimes a limitation a presentiment which proved usually to have been a blank. She performed all those acts of mental prostration in which, on a first visit to Italy, youth and enthusiasm so freely indulge; she felt her heart beat in the presence of immortal genius, and knew the sweetness of rising tears in eyes to which faded fresco and darkened marble grew dim. But the return, every day, was even pleasanter than the going forth; the return into the wide, monumental court of the great house in which Mrs. Touchett, many years before, had established herself, and into the high, cool rooms where carven rafters and pompous frescoes of the sixteenth century looked down upon the familiar commodities of the nineteenth. Mrs. Touchett inhabited an historic building in a narrow street whose very name recalled the strife of Mediæval factions; and found compensation for the darkness of her frontage in the modicity of her rent and the brightness of a garden in which nature itself looked as archaic as the rugged architecture of the palace and which illumined the rooms that were in regular use. Isabel found that to live in such a place might be a source of happiness—almost of excitement. At first it had struck her as a sort of prison; but very soon its prison-like quality became a merit, for she

discovered that it contained other prisoners than the members of her aunt's household. The spirit of the past was shut up there, like a refugee from the outer world; it lurked in lonely corners, and, at night, haunted even the rooms in which Mrs. Touchett diffused her matter-of-fact influence. Isabel used to hear vague echoes and strange reverberations; she had a sense of the hovering of unseen figures, of the flitting of ghosts. Often she paused, listening, half-startled, half-disappointed, on the great cold stone staircase.

Gilbert Osmond came to see Madame Merle, who presented him to the young lady seated almost out of sight at the other end of the room. Isabel, on this occasion, took little share in the conversation; she scarcely even smiled when the others turned to her appealingly; but sat there as an impartial auditor of their brilliant discourse. Mrs. Touchett was not present, and these two had it their own way. They talked extremely well; it struck Isabel almost as a dramatic entertainment, rehearsed in advance. Madame Merle referred everything to her, but the girl answered nothing, though she knew that this attitude would make Mr. Osmond think she was one of those dull people who bored him. It was the worse, too, that Madame Merle would have told him she was almost as much above the merely respectable average as he himself, and that she was putting her friend dreadfully in the wrong. But this was no matter, for once; even if more had depended on it, Isabel could not have made an attempt to shine. There was something in Mr. Osmond that arrested her and held her in suspense—made it seem more important that she should get an impression of him than that she should produce one herself. Besides, Isabel had little skill in producing an impression which she knew to be expected; nothing could be more charming, in general, than to seem dazzling; but she had a perverse unwillingness to perform by arrangement. Mr. Osmond, to do him justice, had a well-bred air of expecting nothing; he was a quiet gentleman, with a colourless manner, who said elaborate things with a great deal of simplicity. Isabel, however, privately perceived that if he did not expect he observed; she was very sure he was sensitive. His face, his head was sensitive; he was not handsome, but he was fine,

as fine as one of the drawings in the long gallery above the bridge, at the Uffizi. Mr. Osmond was very delicate; the tone of his voice alone would have proved it. It was the visitor's delicacy that made her abstain from interference. His talk was like the tinking of glass, and if she had put out her finger she might have changed the pitch and spoiled the concert. Before he went he made an appeal to her.

"Madame Merle says she will come up to my hill-top some day next week and drink tea in my garden. It would give me much pleasure if you would come with her. It's thought rather pretty—there's what they call a general view. My daughter, too, would be so glad—or rather, for she is too young to have strong emotions, I should be so glad—so very glad." And Mr. Osmond paused a moment, with a slight air of embarrassment leaving his sentence unfinished. "I should be so happy if you could know my daughter," he went on, a moment afterwards.

Isabel answered that she should be delighted to see Miss Osmond, and that if Madame Merle would show her the way to the hill-top she should be very grateful. Upon this assurance the visitor took his leave; after which Isabel fully expected that her friend would scold her for having been so stupid. But to her surprise, Madame Merle, who indeed never fell into the matter-of-course, said to her in a few moments—

"You were charming, my dear; you were just as one would have wished you. You are never disappointing."

A rebuke might possibly have been irritating, though it is much more probable that Isabel would have taken it in good part; but, strange to say, the words that Madame Merle actually used caused her the first feeling of displeasure she had known this lady to excite. "That is more than I intended," she answered, coldly. "I am under no obligation that I know of to charm Mr. Osmond."

Madame Merle coloured a moment; but we know it was not her habit to retract. "My dear child, I didn't speak for him, poor man; I spoke for yourself. It is not of course a question as to his liking you; it matters little whether he likes you or not! But I thought you liked him."

"I did," said Isabel, honestly. "But I don't see what that matters, either."

"Everything that concerns you matters to me," Madame Merle returned, with a sort of noble gentleness, "especially when at the same time another old friend is concerned."

Whatever Isabel's obligations may have been to Mr. Osmond, it must be admitted that she found them sufficient to lead her to ask Ralph sundry questions about him. She thought Ralph's judgments cynical, but she flattered herself that she had learned to make allowance for that.

"Do I know him?" said her cousin. "Oh, yes, I know him; not well, but on the whole enough. I have never cultivated his society, and he apparently has never found mine indispensable to his happiness. Who is he—what is he? He is a mysterious American, who has been living these twenty years, or more, in Italy. Why do I call him mysterious? Only as a cover for my ignorance; I don't know his antecedents, his family, his origin. For all I know, he may be a prince in disguise; he rather looks like one, by the way—like a prince who has abdicated in a fit of magnanimity, and has been in a state of disgust ever since. He used to live in Rome; but of late years he has taken up his abode in Florence; I remember hearing him say once that Rome has grown vulgar. He has a great dread of vulgarity; that's his special line; he hasn't any other that I know of. He lives on his income, which I suspect of not being vulgarly large. He's a poor gentleman—that's what he calls himself. He married young and lost his wife, and I believe he has a daughter. He also has a sister, who is married to some little Count or other, of these parts; I remember meeting her of old. She is nicer than he, I should think, but rather wicked. I remember there used to be some stories about her. I don't think I recommend you to know her. But why don't you ask Madame Merle about these people? She knows them all much better than I."

"I ask you because I want your opinion as well as hers," said Isabel.

"A fig for my opinion! If you fall in love with Mr. Osmond, what will you care for that?"

"Not much, probably. But meanwhile it has a certain importance. The more information one has about a person the better."

"I don't agree to that. We know too much about people in these days; we hear too much. Our ears, our minds, our mouths, are stuffed with personalities. Don't mind anything that any one tells you about any one else. Judge every one and everything for yourself."

"That's what I try to do," said Isabel; "but when you do that people call you conceited."

"You are not to mind them—that's precisely my argument; not to mind what they say about yourself any more than what they say about your friend or your enemy."

Isabel was silent a moment. "I think you are right; but there are some things I can't help minding: for instance, when my friend is attacked, or when I myself am praised."

"Of course you are always at liberty to judge the critic. Judge people as critics, however," Ralph added, "and you will condemn them all!"

"I shall see Mr. Osmond for myself," said Isabel. "I have promised to pay him a visit."

"To pay him a visit?"

"To go and see his view, his pictures, his daughter—I don't know exactly what. Madame Merle is to take me; she tells me a great many ladies call upon him."

"Ah, with Madame Merle you may go anywhere, *de confiance*," said Ralph. "She knows none but the best people."

Isabel said no more about Mr. Osmond, but she presently remarked to her cousin that she was not satisfied with his tone about Madame Merle. "It seems to me that you insinuate things about her. I don't know what you mean, but if you have any grounds for disliking her, I think you should either mention them frankly or else say nothing at all."

Ralph, however, resented this charge with more apparent earnestness than he commonly used. "I speak of Madame Merle exactly as I speak to her: with an even exaggerated respect."

"Exaggerated, precisely. That is what I complain of."

"I do so because Madame Merle's merits are exaggerated."

"By whom, pray? By me? If so, I do her a poor service."

"No, no; by herself."

"Ah, I protest!" Isabel cried with fervour. "If ever there was a woman who made small claims——"

"You put your finger on it," Ralph interrupted. "Her modesty is exaggerated. She has no business with small claims—she has a perfect right to make large ones."

"Her merits are large, then. You contradict yourself."

"Her merits are immense," said Ralph. "She is perfect; she is the only woman I know who has but that one little fault."

Isabel turned away with impatience. "I don't understand you; you are too paradoxical for my plain mind."

"Let me explain. When I say she exaggerates, I don't mean it in the vulgar sense—that she boasts, overstates, gives too fine an account of herself. I mean literally that she pushes the search for perfection too far—that her merits are in themselves overstrained. She is too good, too kind, too clever, too learned, too accomplished, too everything. She is too complete, in a word. I confess to you that she acts a little on my nerves, and that I feel about her a good deal as that intensely human Athenian felt about Aristides the Just."

Isabel looked hard at her cousin; but the mocking spirit, if it lurked in his words, failed on this occasion to peep from his eyes.

"Do you wish Madame Merle to be banished?" she inquired.

"By no means. She is much too good company. I delight in Madame Merle," said Ralph Touchett, simply.

"You are very odious, sir!" Isabel exclaimed. And then she asked him if he knew anything that was not to the honour of her brilliant friend.

"Nothing whatever. Don't you see that is just what I mean? Upon the character of every one else you may find some little black speck; if I were to take half-an-hour to it, some day, I have no doubt I should be able to find one on yours. For my own, of course, I am spotted like a leopard. But on Madame Merle's nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"That is just what I think!" said Isabel, with a toss of her head. "That is why I like her so much."

"She is a capital person for you to know. Since you wish to see the world you couldn't have a better guide."

"I suppose you mean by that that she is worldly?"

"Worldly? No," said Ralph, "she is the world itself!"

It had certainly not, as Isabel for the moment took it into her head to believe, been a refinement of malice in him to say that he delighted in Madame Merle. Ralph Touchett took his entertainment wherever he could find it, and he would not have forgiven himself if he had not been able to find a great deal in the society of a woman in whom the social virtues existed in polished perfection. There are deep-lying sympathies and antipathies; and it may have been that in spite of the intellectual justice he rendered her, her absence from his mother's house would not have made life seem barren. But Ralph Touchett had learned to appreciate, and there could be no better field for such a talent than the table-talk of Madame Merle. He talked with her largely, treated her with conspicuous civility, occupied himself with her and let her alone, with an opportuneness which she herself could not have surpassed. There were moments when he felt almost sorry for her; and these, oddly enough, were the moments when his kindness was least demonstrative. He was sure that she had been richly ambitious, and that what she had visibly accomplished was far below her ambition. She had got herself into perfect training, but she had won none of the prizes. She was always plain Madame Merle, the widow of a Swiss *négociant*, with a small income and a large acquaintance, who stayed with people a great deal, and was universally liked. The contrast between this position and any one of some half-dozen others which he vividly imagined her to have had her eyes upon at various moments, had an element of the tragical. His mother thought he got on beautifully with their pliable guest; to Mrs. Touchett's sense two people who dealt so largely in factitious theories of conduct would have much in common. He had given a great deal of consideration to Isabel's intimacy with Madame Merle —having long since made up his mind that he could not, without opposition, keep his cousin to himself; and he

regarded it on the whole with philosophic tolerance. He believed it would take care of itself; it would not last for ever. Neither of these two superior persons knew the other as well as she supposed, and when each of them had made certain discoveries, there would be, if not a rupture, at least a relaxation. Meanwhile he was quite willing to admit that the conversation of the elder lady was an advantage to the younger, who had a great deal to learn, and would doubtless learn it better from Madame Merle than from some other instructors of the young. It was not probable that Isabel would be injured.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT would certainly have been hard to see what injury could arise to her from the visit she presently paid to Mr. Osmond's hill-top. Nothing could have been more charming than this occasion—a soft afternoon in May, in the full maturity of the Italian spring. The two ladies drove out of the Roman Gate, beneath the enormous black superstructure which crowns the fine clear arch of that portal and makes it nakedly impressive, and wound between high-walled lanes, into which the wealth of blossoming orchards overdrooped and flung a perfume, until they reached the small superurban piazza, of crooked shape, of which the long brown wall of the villa occupied in part by Mr. Osmond, formed the principal, or at least the most imposing, side. Isabel went with her friend through a wide, high court, where a clear shadow rested below, and a pair of light-arched galleries, facing each other above, caught the upper sunshine upon their slim columns and the flowering plants in which they were dressed. There was something rather severe about the place; it looked somehow as if, once you were in it, it would not be easy to get out. For Isabel, however, there was of course as yet no thought of getting out, but only of advancing. Mr. Osmond met her in the cold ante-chamber—it was cold even in the month of May—and ushered her, with her companion, into the apartment to which we have already been introduced. Madame Merle was in front, and while Isabel lingered a little, talking with Mr. Osmond, she went forward, familiarly, and greeted two persons who were seated in the drawing-room. One of these was little Pansy, on whom she bestowed a kiss; the other was a lady whom Mr. Osmond presented to Isabel as his sister, the Countess Gemini. "And that is my little girl," he said, "who has just come out of a convent."

Pansy had on a scanty white dress, and her fair hair was neatly arranged in a net; she wore a pair of slippers, tied

sandal-fashion, about her ankles. She made Isabel a little conventual curtsey, and then came to be kissed. The Countess Gemini simply nodded, without getting up; Isabel could see that she was a woman of fashion. She was thin and dark, and not at all pretty, having features that suggested some tropical bird—a long beak-like nose, a small, quickly-moving eye, and a mouth and chin that receded extremely. Her face, however, thanks to a very human and feminine expression, was by no means disagreeable, and, as regards her appearance, it was evident that she understood herself and made the most of her points. The soft brilliancy of her toilet had the look of shimmering plumage, and her attitudes were light and sudden, like those of a creature that perched upon twigs. She had a great deal of manner; Isabel, who had never known any one with so much manner, immediately classified the Countess Gemini as the most affected of women. She remembered that Ralph had not recommended her as an acquaintance; but she was ready to acknowledge that on a casual view the Countess presented no appearance of wickedness. Nothing could have been kinder or more innocent than her greeting to Isabel.

"You will believe that I am glad to see you when I tell you that it is only because I knew you were to be here that I came myself. I don't come and see my brother—I make him come and see me. This hill of his is impossible—I don't see what possesses him. Really, Osmond, you will be the ruin of my horses some day; and if they receive an injury you will have to give me another pair. I heard them panting to-day; I assure you I did. It is very disagreeable to hear one's horses panting when one is sitting in the carriage; it sounds, too, as if they were not what they should be. But I have always had good horses; whatever else I may have lacked, I have always managed that. My husband doesn't know much, but I think he does know a horse. In general the Italians don't, but my husband goes in, according to his poor light, for everything English. My horses are English—so it is all the greater pity they should be ruined. I must tell you," she went on, directly addressing Isabel, "that Osmond doesn't often invite me; I don't think he likes to have me. It was quite my own idea, coming to-day. I like to see new people,

and I am sure you are very new. But don't sit there; that chair is not what it looks. There are some very good seats here, but there are also some horrors."

These remarks were delivered with a variety of little jerks and glances, in a tone which, although it expressed a high degree of good-nature, was rather shrill than sweet.

"I don't like to have you, my dear?" said her brother. "I am sure you are invaluable."

"I don't see any horrors anywhere," Isabel declared, looking about her. "Everything here seems to me very beautiful."

"I have got a few good things," Mr. Osmond murmured; "indeed I have nothing very bad. But I have not what I should have liked."

He stood there a little awkwardly, smiling and glancing about; his manner was an odd mixture of the indifferent and the expressive. He seemed to intimate that nothing was of much consequence. Isabel made a rapid induction: perfect simplicity was not the badge of his family. Even the little girl from the convent, who, in her prim white dress, with her small submissive face and her hands locked before her, stood there as if she were about to partake of her first communion—even Mr. Osmond's diminutive daughter had a kind of finish which was not entirely artless.

"You would have liked a few things from the Uffizi and the Pitti—that's what you would have liked," said Madame Merle.

"Poor Osmond, with his old curtains and crucifixes!" the Countess Gemini exclaimed; she appeared to call her brother only by his family-name. Her ejaculation had no particular object; she smiled at Isabel as she made it, and looked at her from head to foot.

Her brother had not heard her; he seemed to be thinking what he could say to Isabel. "Won't you have some tea?—you must be very tired," he at last bethought himself of remarking.

"No, indeed, I am not tired; what have I done to tire me?" Isabel felt a certain need of being very direct, of pretending to nothing; there was something in the air, in her general impression of things—she could hardly have said what it

was—that deprived her of all disposition to put herself forward. The place, the occasion, the combination of people, signified more than lay on the surface; she would try to understand—she would not simply utter graceful platitudes. Poor Isabel was perhaps not aware that many women would have uttered graceful platitudes to cover the working of their observation. It must be confessed that her pride was a trifle alarmed. A man whom she had heard spoken of in terms that excited interest, and who was evidently capable of distinguishing himself, had invited her, a young lady not lavish of her favours, to come to his house. Now that she had done so, the burden of the entertainment rested naturally upon himself: Isabel was not rendered less observant, and for the moment, I am afraid she was not rendered more indulgent by perceiving that Mr. Osmond carried his burden less complacently than might have been expected. "What a tool I was to have invited these women here!" she could fancy his exclaiming to himself.

"You will be tired when you go home, if he shows you all his bibelots and gives you a lecture on each," said the Countess Gemini.

"I am not afraid of that; but if I am tired, I shall at least have learned something."

"Very little, I suspect. But my sister is dreadfully afraid of learning anything," said Mr. Osmond.

"Oh, I confess to that; I don't want to know anything more —I know too much already. The more you know, the more unhappy you are."

"You should not undervalue knowledge before Pansy, who has not finished her education," Madame Merle interposed, with a smile.

"Pansy will never know any harm," said the child's father. "Pansy is a little convent-flower."

"Oh, the convents, the convents!" cried the Countess, with a sharp laugh. "Speak to me of the convents. You may learn anything there; I am a convent-flower myself. I don't pretend to be good, but the nuns do. Don't you see what I mean?" she went on, appealing to Isabel.

Isabel was not sure that she saw, and she answered that she was very bad at following arguments. The Countess

then declared that she herself detested arguments, but that this was her brother's taste—he would always discuss. "For me," she said, "one should like a thing or one shouldn't; one can't like everything, of course. But one shouldn't attempt to reason it out—you never know where it may lead you. There are some very good feelings that may have bad reasons; don't you know? And then there are very bad feelings, sometimes, that have good reasons. Don't you see what I mean? I don't care anything about reasons, but I know what I like."

"Ah, that's the great thing," said Isabel, smiling, but suspecting that her acquaintance with this lightly-flitting personage would not lead to intellectual repose. If the Countess objected to argument, Isabel at this moment had as little taste for it, and she put out her hand to Pansy with a pleasant sense that such a gesture committed her to nothing that would admit of a divergence of views. Gilbert Osmond apparently took a rather hopeless view of his sister's tone, and he turned the conversation to another topic. He presently sat down on the other side of his daughter, who had taken Isabel's hand for a moment; but he ended by drawing her out of her chair, and making her stand between his knees, leaning against him while he passed his arm round her little waist. The child fixed her eyes on Isabel with a still, disinterested gaze, which seemed void of an intention, but conscious of an attraction. Mr. Osmond talked of many things; Madame Merle had said he could be agreeable when he chose, and to-day, after a little, he appeared not only to have chosen, but to have determined. Madame Merle and Countess Gemini sat a little apart, conversing in the effortless manner of persons who knew each other well enough to take their ease; every now and then Isabel heard the Countess say something extravagant. Mr. Osmond talked of Florence, of Italy, of the pleasure of living in that country, and of the abatements to such pleasure. There were both satisfactions and drawbacks; the drawbacks were pretty numerous; strangers were too apt to see Italy in rose-colour. On the whole it was better than other countries, if one was content to lead a quiet life and take things as they came. It was very dull sometimes, but there were advantages in living

in the country which contained the most beauty. There were certain impressions that one could get only in Italy. There were others that one never got there, and one got some that were very bad. But from time to time one got a delightful one, which made up for everything. He was inclined to think that Italy had spoiled a great many people; he was even fatuous enough to believe at times that he himself might have been a better man if he had spent less of his life there. It made people idle and dilettantish, and second-rate; there was nothing tonic in an Italian life. One was out of the current; one was not *dans le mouvement*, as the French said; one was too far from Paris and London. "We are gloriously provincial, I assure you," said Mr. Osmond, "and I am perfectly aware that I myself am as rusty as a key that has no lock to fit it. It polishes me up a little to talk with you—not that I venture to pretend I can turn that very complicated lock I suspect your intellect of being! But you will be going away before I have seen you three times, and I shall perhaps never see you after that. That's what it is to live in a country that people come to. When they are disagreeable it is bad enough; when they are agreeable it is still worse. As soon as you find you like them they are off again! I have been deceived too often; I have ceased to form attachments; to permit myself to feel attractions. You mean to stay—to settle? That would be really comfortable. Ah yes, your aunt is a sort of guarantee; I believe she may be depended upon. Oh, she's an old Florentine; I mean literally an old one; not a modern outsider. She is a contemporary of the Medici; she must have been present at the burning of Savonarola, and I am not sure she didn't throw a handful of chips into the flame. Her face is very much like some faces in the early pictures: little, dry, definite faces, that must have had a good deal of expression, but almost always the same one. Indeed, I can show you her portrait in a fresco of Ghirlandaio's. I hope you don't object to my speaking that way of your aunt, eh? I have an idea you don't. Perhaps you think that's even worse. I assure you there is no want of respect in it, to either of you. You know I'm a particular admirer of Mrs. Touchett."

While Isabel's host exerted himself to entertain her in this somewhat confidential fashion, she looked occasionally at Madame Merle, who met her eyes with an inattentive smile in which, on this occasion, there was no infelicitous intimation that our heroine appeared to advantage. Madame Merle eventually proposed to the Countess Gemini that they should go into the garden, and the Countess, rising and shaking out her soft plumage, began to rustle toward the door.

"Poor Miss Archer!" she exclaimed, surveying the other group with expressive compassion. "She has been brought quite into the family."

"Miss Archer can certainly have nothing but sympathy for a family to which you belong," Mr. Osmond answered, with a laugh which, though it had something of a mocking ring, was not ill-natured.

"I don't know what you mean by that! I am sure she will see no harm in me but what you tell her. I am better than he says, Miss Archer," the Countess went on. "I am only rather light. Is that all he has said? Ah then, you keep him in good humour. Has he opened on one of his favourite subjects? I give you notice that there are two or three that he treats *à fond*. In that case you had better take off your bonnet."

"I don't think I know what Mr. Osmond's favourite subjects are," said Isabel, who had risen to her feet.

The Countess assumed, for an instant, an attitude of intense meditation; pressing one of her hands, with the fingertips gathered together, to her forehead.

"I'll tell you in a moment," she answered. "One is Machiavelli, the other is Vittoria Colonna, the next is Metastasio."

"Ah, with me," said Madame Merle, passing her arm into the Countess Gemini's, as if to guide her course to the garden, "Mr. Osmond is never so historical."

"Oh you," the Countess answered as they moved away, "you yourself are Machiavelli—you yourself are Vittoria Colonna!"

"We shall hear next that poor Madame Merle is Metastasio!" Gilbert Osmond murmured, with a little melancholy smile.

Isabel had got up, on the assumption that they too were to go into the garden; but Mr. Osmond stood there, with no apparent inclination to leave the room, with his hands in the pockets of his jacket, and his daughter, who had now locked her arm into one of his own, clinging to him and looking up, while her eyes moved from his own face to Isabel's. Isabel waited, with a certain unuttered contentedness, to have her movements directed; she liked Mr. Osmond's talk, his company; she felt that she was being entertained. Through the open doors of the great room she saw Madame Merle and the Countess stroll across the deep grass of the garden; then she turned, and her eyes wandered over the things that were scattered about her. The understanding had been that her host should show her his treasures; his pictures and cabinets all looked like treasures. Isabel, after a moment, went toward one of the pictures to see it better; but just as she had done so Mr. Osmond said to her abruptly—

"Miss Archer, what do you think of my sister?"

Isabel turned, with a good deal of surprise.

"Ah, don't ask me that—I have seen your sister too little."

"Yes, you have seen her very little; but you must have observed that there is not a great deal of her to see. What do you think of our family tone?" Osmond went on, smiling. "I should like to know how it strikes a fresh, unprejudiced mind. I know what you are going to say—you have had too little observation of it. Of course this is only a glimpse. But just take notice, in future, if you have a chance. I sometimes think we have got into a rather bad way, living off here among things and people not our own, without responsibilities or attachments, with nothing to hold us together or keep us up; marrying foreigners, forming artificial tastes, playing tricks with our natural mission. Let me add, though, that I say that much more for myself than for my sister. She's a very good woman—better than she seems. She is rather unhappy, and as she is not of a very serious disposition, she doesn't tend to show it tragically; she shows it comically instead. She has got a nasty husband, though I am not sure she makes the best of him. Of course, however, a nasty husband is

an awkward thing. Madame Merle gives her excellent advice, but it's a good deal like giving a child a dictionary to learn a language with. He can look out the words, but he can't put them together. My sister needs a grammar, but unfortunately she is not grammatical. Excuse my troubling you with these details; my sister was very right in saying that you have been taken into the family. Let me take down that picture; you want more light."

He took down the picture, carried it toward the window, related some curious facts about it. She looked at the other works of art, and he gave her such further information as might appear to be most acceptable to a young lady making a call on a summer afternoon. His pictures, his carvings and tapestries were interesting; but after a while Isabel became conscious that the owner was more interesting still. He resembled no one she had ever seen; most of the people she knew might be divided into groups of half-a-dozen specimens. There were one or two exceptions to this; she could think, for instance, of no group that would contain her aunt Lydia. There were other people who were, relatively speaking, original—original, as one might say, by courtesy—such as Mr. Goodwood, as her cousin Ralph, as Henrietta Stackpole, as Lord Warburton, as Madame Merle. But in essentials, when one came to look at them, these individuals belonged to types which were already present to her mind. Her mind contained no class which offered a natural place to Mr. Osmond—he was a specimen apart. Isabel did not say all these things to herself at the time; but she felt them, and afterwards they became distinct. For the moment she only said to herself that Mr. Osmond had the interest of rareness. It was not so much what he said and did, but rather what he withheld, that distinguished him; he indulged in no striking deflections from common usage; he was an original without being an eccentric. Isabel had never met a person of so fine a grain. The peculiarity was physical, to begin with, and it extended to his immaterial part. His dense, delicate hair, his overdrawn, retouched features, his clear complexion, ripe without being coarse, the very evenness of the growth of his beard, and that light, smooth, slenderness of structure which

made the movement of a single one of his fingers produce the effect of an expressive gesture—these personal points struck our observant young lady as the signs of an unusual sensibility. He was certainly fastidious and critical; he was probably irritable. His sensibility had governed him—possibly governed him too much; it had made him impatient of vulgar troubles and had led him to live by himself, in a serene, impersonal way, thinking about art and beauty and history. He had consulted his taste in everything—his taste alone, perhaps; that was what made him so different from every one else. Ralph had something of this same quality, this appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship; but in Ralph it was an anomaly, a kind of humorous excrescence, whereas in Mr. Osmond it was the key-note, and everything was in harmony with it. Isabel was certainly far from understanding him completely; his meaning was not at all times obvious. It was hard to see what he meant, for instance, by saying that he was gloriously provincial—which was so exactly the opposite of what she had supposed. Was it a harmless paradox, intended to puzzle her? or was it the last refinement of high culture? Isabel trusted that she should learn in time; it would be very interesting to learn. If Mr. Osmond were provincial, pray what were the characteristics of the capital? Isabel could ask herself this question, in spite of having perceived that her host was a shy personage; for such shyness as his—the shyness of ticklish nerves and fine perceptions—was perfectly consistent with the best breeding. Indeed, it was almost a proof of superior qualities. Mr. Osmond was not a man of easy assurance, who chatted and gossiped with the fluency of a superficial nature; he was critical of himself as well as of others, and exacting a good deal of others (to think them agreeable), he probably took a rather ironical view of what he himself offered: a proof, into the bargain, that he was not grossly conceited. If he had not been shy, he would not have made that gradual, subtle, successful effort to overcome his shyness, to which Isabel felt that she owed both what pleased and what puzzled her in his conversation to-day. He suddenly asked her what she thought of the Countess of

Gemini—that was doubtless a proof that he was interested in her feelings; it could scarcely be as a help to knowledge of his own sister. That he should be so interested showed an inquiring mind; but it was a little singular that he should sacrifice his fraternal feeling to his curiosity. This was the most eccentric thing he had done.

There were two other rooms, beyond the one in which she had been received, equally full of picturesque objects, and in these apartments Isabel spent a quarter of an hour. Every thing was very curious and valuable, and Mr. Osmond continued to be the kindest of ciceroni, as he led her from one fine piece to another, still holding his little girl by the hand. His kindness almost surprised our young lady, who wondered why he should take so much trouble for her; and she was oppressed at last with the accumulation of beauty and knowledge to which she found herself introduced. There was enough for the present; she had ceased to attend to what he said; she listened to him with attentive eyes, but she was not thinking of what he told her. He probably thought she was cleverer than she was; Madame Merle would have told him so; which was a pity, because in the end he would be sure to find out, and then perhaps even her real cleverness would not reconcile him to his mistake. A part of Isabel's fatigue came from the effort to appear as intelligent as she believed Madame Merle had described her, and from the fear (very unusual with her) of exposing—not her ignorance; for that she cared comparatively little—but her possible grossness of perception. It would have annoyed her to express a liking for something which her host, in his superior enlightenment, would think she ought not to like; or to pass by something at which the truly initiated mind would arrest itself. She was very careful, therefore, as to what she said, as to what she noticed or failed to notice—more careful than she had ever been before.

They came back into the first of the rooms, where the tea had been served; but as the two other ladies were still on the terrace, and as Isabel had not yet been made acquainted with the view, which constituted the paramount distinction of the place, Mr. Osmond directed her steps

into the garden without more delay. Madame Merle and the Countess had had chairs brought out, and as the afternoon was lovely, the Countess proposed they should take their tea in the open air. Pansy, therefore, was sent to bid the servant bring out the tray. The sun had got low, the golden light took a deeper tone, and on the mountains and the plain that stretched beneath them, the masses of purple shadow seemed to glow as richly as the places that were still exposed. The scene had an extraordinary charm. The air was almost solemnly still, and the large expanse of the landscape, with its gardenlike culture and nobleness of outline, its teeming valley and delicately-fretted hills, its peculiarly human-looking touches of habitation, lay there in splendid harmony and classic grace.

"You seem so well pleased that I think you can be trusted to come back," Mr. Osmond said, as he led his companion to one of the angles of the terrace.

"I shall certainly come back," Isabel answered, "in spite of what you say about its being bad to live in Italy. What was that you said about one's natural mission? I wonder if I should forsake my natural mission if I were to settle in Florence."

"A woman's natural mission is to be where she is most appreciated."

"The point is to find out where that is."

"Very true—a woman often wastes a great deal of time in the inquiry. People ought to make it very plain to her."

"Such a matter would have to be made very plain to me," said Isabel, smiling.

"I am glad, at any rate, to hear you talk of settling. Madame Merle had given me an idea that you were of a rather roving disposition. I thought she spoke of your having some plan of going round the world."

"I am rather ashamed of my plans; I make a new one every day."

"I don't see why you should be ashamed; it's the greatest of pleasures."

"It seems frivolous, I think," said Isabel. "One ought to choose something very deliberately, and be faithful to that."

"By that rule, then, I have not been frivolous."

"Have you never made plans?"

"Yes, I made one years ago, and I am acting on it to-day."

"It must have been a very pleasant one," said Isabel.

"It was very simple. It was to be as quiet as possible."

"As quiet?" the girl repeated.

"Not to worry—not to strive nor struggle. To resign myself. To be content with a little." He uttered these sentences slowly, with little pauses between, and his intelligent eyes were fixed upon Isabel's with the conscious look of a man who has brought himself to confess something.

"Do you call that simple?" Isabel asked, with a gentle laugh.

"Yes, because it's negative."

"Has your life been negative?"

"Call it affirmative if you like. Only it has affirmed my indifference. Mind you, not my natural indifference—I had none. But my studied, my wilful renunciation."

Isabel scarcely understood him; it seemed a question whether he were joking or not. Why should a man who struck her as having a great fund of reserve suddenly bring himself to be so confidential? This was his affair, however, and his confidences were interesting. "I don't see why you should have renounced," she said in a moment.

"Because I could do nothing. I had no prospects, I was poor, and I was not a man of genius. I had no talents even; I took my measure early in life. I was simply the most fastidious young gentleman living. There were two or three people in the world I envied—the Emperor of Russia, for instance, and the Sultan of Turkey! There were even moments when I envied the Pope of Rome—for the consideration he enjoys. I should have been delighted to be considered to that extent; but since that couldn't be, I didn't care for anything, less, and I made up my mind not to go in for honours. A gentleman can always consider himself, and fortunately, I was a gentleman. I could do nothing in Italy—I couldn't even be an Italian patriot. To do that, I should have had to go out of the country; and I was too fond of it to leave it. So I have passed a great many years here, on that quiet plan I spoke of. I have not been at all unhappy. I don't mean to say I have cared for nothing; but

the things I have cared for have been definite—limited. The events of my life have been absolutely unperceived by any one save myself; getting an old silver crucifix at a bargain (I have never bought anything dear, of course), or discovering, as I once did, a sketch by Correggio on a panel daubed over by some inspired idiot!"

This would have been rather a dry account of Mr. Osmond's career if Isabel had fully believed it; but her imagination supplied the human element which she was sure had not been wanting. His life had been mingled with other lives more than he admitted; of course she could not expect him to enter into this. For the present she abstained from provoking further revelations; to intimate that he had not told her everything would be more familiar and less considerate than she now desired to be. He had certainly told her quite enough. It was her present inclination, however, to express considerable sympathy for the success with which he had preserved his independence. "That's a very pleasant life," she said, "to renounce everything but Correggio!"

"Oh, I have been very happy; don't imagine me to suggest for a moment that I have not. It's one's own fault if one is not happy."

"Have you lived here always?"

"No, not always. I lived a long time at Naples, and many years in Rome. But I have been here a good while. Perhaps I shall have to change, however; to do something else. I have no longer myself to think of. My daughter is growing up, and it is very possible she may not care so much for the Correggios and crucifixes as I. I shall have to do what is best for her."

"Yes, do that," said Isabel. "She is such a dear little girl."

"Ah," cried Gilbert Osmond, with feeling, "she is a little saint of heaven! She is my great happiness!"

CHAPTER XXV

WHILE this sufficiently intimate colloquy (prolonged for some time after we cease to follow it) was going on, Madame Merle and her companion, breaking a silence of some duration, had begun to exchange remarks. They were sitting in an attitude of unexpressed expectancy; an attitude especially marked on the part of the Countess Gemini, who, being of a more nervous temperament than Madame Merle practised with less success the art of disguising impatience. What these ladies were waiting for would not have been apparent, and was perhaps not very definite to their own minds. Madame Merle waited for Osmond to release their young friend from her *tête-à-tête,* and the Countess waited because Madame Merle did. The Countess, moreover, by waiting, found the time ripe for saying something discordant; a necessity of which she had been conscious for the last twenty minutes. Her brother wandered with Isabel to the end of the garden, and she followed the pair for a while with her eyes.

"My dear," she then observed to Madame Merle, "you will excuse me if I don't congratulate you!"

"Very willingly; for I don't in the least know why you should."

"Haven't you a little plan that you think rather well of?" And the Countess nodded towards the retreating couple.

Madame Merle's eyes took the same direction; then she looked serenely at her neighbour. "You know I never understand you very well,'" she answered, smiling.

"No one can understand better than you when you wish. I see that, just now, you don't wish to."

"You say things to me that no one else does," said Madame Merle, gravely, but without bitterness.

"You mean things you don't like? Doesn't Osmond sometimes say such things?"

"What your brother says has a point."

"Yes, a very sharp one sometimes. If you mean that I am not so clever as he, you must not think I shall suffer from your saying it. But it will be much better that you should understand me."

"Why so?" asked Madame Merle; "what difference will it make?"

"If I don't approve of your plan, you ought to know it in order to appreciate the danger of my interfering with it."

Madame Merle looked as if she were ready to admit that there might be something in this; but in a moment she said quietly—"You think me more calculating than I am."

"It's not your calculating that I think ill of; it's your calculating wrong. You have done so in this case."

"You must have made extensive calculations yourself to discover it."

"No, I have not had time for that. I have seen the girl but this once," said the Countess, "and the conviction has suddenly come to me. I like her very much."

"So do I," Madame Merle declared.

"You have a strange way of showing it."

"Surely—I have given her the advantage of making your acquaintance."

"That, indeed," cried the Countess, with a laugh, "is perhaps the best thing that could happen to her!"

Madame Merle said nothing for some time. The Countess's manner was impertinent, but she did not suffer this to discompose her; and with her eyes upon the violet slope of Monte Morello she gave herself up to reflection.

"My dear lady," she said at last, "I advise you not to agitate yourself. The matter you allude to concerns three persons much stronger of purpose than yourself."

"Three persons? You and Osmond, of course. But is Miss Archer also very strong of purpose?"

"Quite as much so as we."

"Ah then," said the Countess radiantly, "if I convince her it's her interest to resist you, she will do so successfully!"

"Resist us? Why do you express yourself so coarsely? She is not to be subjected to force."

"I am not sure of that. You are capable of anything, you and Osmond. I don't mean Osmond by himself, and I don't

mean you by yourself. But together you are dangerous—like some chemical combination."

"You had better leave us alone, then," said Madame Merle, smiling.

"I don't mean to touch you—but I shall talk to that girl."

"My poor Amy," Madame Merle murmured, "I don't see what has got into your head."

"I take an interest in her—that is what has got into my head. I like her."

Madame Merle hesitated a moment. "I don't think she likes you."

The Countess's bright little eyes expanded, and her face was set in a grimace. "Ah, you *are* dangerous," she cried, "even by yourself!"

"If you want her to like you, don't abuse your brother to her," said Madame Merle.

"I don't suppose you pretend she has fallen in love with him—in two interviews."

Madame Merle looked a moment at Isabel and at the master of the house. He was leaning against the parapet, facing her, with his arms folded; and she, at present, though she had her face turned to the opposite prospect, was evidently not scrutinising it. As Madame Merle watched her she lowered her eyes; she was listening, possibly with a certain embarrassment, while she pressed the point of her parasol into the path. Madame Merle rose from her chair. "Yes, I think so!" she said.

The shabby footboy, summoned by Pansy, had come out with a small table, which he placed upon the grass, and then had gone back and fetched the tea-tray; after which he again disappeared, to return with a couple of chairs. Pansy had watched these proceedings with the deepest interest, standing with her small hands folded together upon the front of her scanty frock; but she had not presumed to offer assistance to the servant. When the tea-table had been arranged, however, she gently approached her aunt.

"Do you think papa would object to my making the tea?"

The Countess looked at her with a deliberately critical gaze, and without answering her question. "My poor niece," she said, "is that your best frock?"

"Ah no," Pansy answered, "it's just a little toilet for common occasions."

"Do you call it a common occasion when I come to see you?—to say nothing of Madame Merle and the pretty lady yonder."

Pansy reflected a moment, looking gravely from one of the persons mentioned to the other. Then her face broke into its perfect smile. "I have a pretty dress, but even that one is very simple. Why should I expose it beside your beautiful things?"

"Because it's the prettiest you have; for me you must always wear the prettiest. Please put it on the next time. It seems to me they don't dress you so well as they might."

The child stroked down her antiquated skirt, sparingly. "It's a good little dress to make tea—don't you think? Do you not believe papa would allow me?"

"Impossible for me to say, my child," said the Countess. "For me, your father's ideas are unfathomable. Madame Merle understands them better; ask her."

Madame Merle smiled with her usual geniality. "It's a weighty question—let me think. It seems to me it would please your father to see a careful little daughter making his tea. It's the proper duty of the daughter of the house—when she grows up."

"So it seems to me, Madame Merle!" Pansy cried "You shall see how well I will make it. A spoonful for each." And she began to busy herself at the table.

"Two spoonfuls for me," said the Countess, who with Madame Merle, remained for some moments watching her. "Listen to me, Pansy," the Countess resumed at last. "I should like to know what you think of your visitor."

"Ah, she is not mine—she is papa's," said Pansy.

"Miss Archer came to see you as well," Madame Merle remarked.

"I am very happy to hear that. She has been very polite to me."

"Do you like her, then?" the Countess asked.

"She is charming—charming," said Pansy, in her little neat, conversational tone. "She pleases me exceedingly."

"And you think she pleases your father?"

"Ah, really, Countess," murmured Madame Merle, dissuasively. "Go and call them to tea," she went on, to the child.

"You will see if they don't like it!" Pansy declared; and went off to summon the others, who were still lingering at the end of the terrace.

"If Miss Archer is to become her mother it is surely interesting to know whether the child likes her," said the Countess.

"If your brother marries again it won't be for Pansy's sake," Madame Merle replied. "She will soon be sixteen, and after that she will begin to need a husband rather than a stepmother."

"And will you provide the husband as well?"

"I shall certainly take an interest in her marrying well. I imagine you will do the same."

"Indeed I shan't!" cried the Countess. "Why should I of all women, set such a price on a husband?"

"You didn't marry well; that's what I am speaking of. When I say a husband, I mean a good one."

"There are no good ones. Osmond won't be a good one."

Madame Merle closed her eyes a moment. "You are irritated just now; I don't know why," she said, presently. "I don't think you will really object either to your brother, or to your niece's, marrying, when the time comes for them to do so; and as regards Pansy, I am confident that we shall some day have the pleasure of looking for a husband for her together. Your large acquaintance will be a great help."

"Yes, I am irritated," the Countess answered. "You often irritate me. Your own coolness is fabulous; you are a strange woman."

"It is much better that we should always act together," Madame Merle went on.

"Do you mean that as a threat?" asked the Countess, rising.

Madame Merle shook her head, with a smile of sadness. "No indeed, you have not my coolness!"

Isabel and Mr. Osmond were now coming toward them, and Isabel had taken Pansy by the hand.

"Do you pretend to believe he would make her happy?" the Countess demanded.

"If he should marry Miss Archer I suppose he would behave like a gentleman."

The Countess jerked herself into a succession of attitudes. "Do you mean as most gentlemen behave? That would be much to be thankful for! Of course Osmond's a gentleman; his own sister needn't be reminded of that. But does he think he can marry any girl he happens to pick out? Osmond's a gentleman, of course; but I must say I have never, no never, seen any one of Osmond's pretensions! What they are all based upon is more than I can say. I am his own sister; I might be supposed to know. Who is he, if you please? What has he ever done? If there had been anything particularly grand in his origin—if he were made of some superior clay—I suppose I should have got some inkling of it. If there had been any great honours or splendours in the family, I should certainly have made the most of them; they would have been quite in my line. But there is nothing, nothing, nothing. One's parents were charming people of course; but so were yours, I have no doubt. Every one is a charming person, now-a-days. Even I am a charming person; don't laugh, it has literally been said. As for Osmond, he has always appeared to believe that he is descended from the gods."

"You may say what you please," said Madame Merle, who had listened to this quick outbreak none the less attentively, we may believe, because her eye wandered away from the speaker, and her hands busied themselves with adjusting the knots of ribbon on her dress. "You Osmonds are a fine race —your blood must flow from some very pure source. Your brother, like an intelligent man, has had the conviction of it, if he has not had the proofs. You are modest about it, but you yourself are extremely distinguished. What do you say about your niece? The child's a little duchess. Nevertheless," Madame Merle added, "it will not be an easy matter for Osmond to marry Miss Archer. But he can try."

"I hope she will refuse him. It will take him down a little."

"We must not forget that he is one of the cleverest of men."

"I have heard you say that before; but I haven't yet discovered what he has done."

"What he has done? He has done nothing that has had to be undone. And he has known how to wait."

"To wait for Miss Archer's money? How much of it is there?"

"That's not what I mean," said Madame Merle. "Miss Archer has seventy thousand pounds."

"Well, it is a pity she is so nice," the Countess declared. "To be sacrificed, any girl would do. She needn't be superior."

"If she were not superior, your brother would never look at her. He must have the best."

"Yes," rejoined the Countess, as they went forward a little to meet the others, "he is very hard to please. That makes me fear for her happiness!"

CHAPTER XXVI

GILBERT OSMOND came to see Isabel again; that is, he came to the Palazzo Crescentini. He had other friends there as well; and to Mrs. Touchett and Madame Merle he was always impartially civil; but the former of these ladies noted the fact that in the course of a fortnight he called five times, and compared it with another fact that she found no difficulty in remembering. Two visits a year had hitherto constituted his regular tribute to Mrs. Touchett's charms, and she had never observed that he selected for such visits those moments, of almost periodical recurrence, when Madame Merle was under her roof. It was not for Madame Merle that he came; these two were old friends, and he never put himself out for her. He was not fond of Ralph—Ralph had told her so—and it was not supposable that Mr. Osmond had suddenly taken a fancy to her son. Ralph was imperturbable—Ralph had a kind of loose-fitting urbanity that wrapped him about like an ill-made overcoat, but of which he never divested himself; he thought Mr. Osmond very good company, and would have been willing at any time to take the hospitable view of his idiosyncrasies. But he did not flatter himself that the desire to repair a past injustice was the motive of their visitor's calls; he read the situation more clearly. Isabel was the attraction, and in all conscience a sufficient one. Osmond was a critic, a student of the exquisite, and it was natural he should admire an admirable person. So when his mother said to him that it was very plain what Mr. Osmond was thinking of, Ralph replied that he was quite of her opinion. Mrs. Touchett had always liked Mr. Osmond; she thought him so much of a gentleman. As he had never been an importunate visitor he had had no chance to be offensive, and he was recommended to Mrs. Touchett by his appearance of being as well able to do without her as she was to do without him—a quality that always excited her esteem. It gave her

no satisfaction, however, to think that he had taken it into his head to marry her niece. Such an alliance, on Isabel's part, would have an air of almost morbid perversity. Mrs. Touchett easily remembered that the girl had refused an English peer; and that a young lady for whom Lord Warburton had not been up to the mark should content herself with an obscure American dilettante, a middle-aged widower with an overgrown daughter and an income of nothing—this answered to nothing in Mrs. Touchett's conception of success. She took, it will be observed, not the sentimental, but the political, view of matrimony—a view which has always had much to recommend it. "I trust she won't have the folly to listen to him," she said to her son; to which Ralph replied that Isabel's listening was one thing and her answering quite another. He knew that she had listened to others, but that she had made them listen to her in return; and he found much entertainment in the idea that, in these few months that he had known her, he should see a third suitor at her gate. She had wanted to see life, and fortune was serving her to her taste; a succession of gentlemen going down on their knees to her was by itself a respectable chapter of experience. Ralph looked forward to a fourth and a fifth *soupirant;* he had no conviction that she would stop at a third. She would keep the gate ajar and open a parley; she would certainly not allow number three to come in. He expressed this view, somewhat after this fashion, to his mother, who looked at him as if he had been dancing a jig. He had such a fanciful, pictorial way of saying things that he might as well address her in the deaf-mute's alphabet.

"I don't think I know what you mean," she said; "you use too many metaphors; I could never understand allegories. The two words in the language I most respect are Yes and No. If Isabel wants to marry Mr. Osmond, she will do so in spite of all your similes. Let her alone to find a favourable comparison for anything she undertakes. I know very little about the young man in America; I don't think she spends much of her time in thinking of him, and I suspect he has got tired of waiting for her. There is nothing in life to prevent her marrying Mr. Osmond, if she only looks at him in a certain way. That is all very well; no

one approves more than I of one's pleasing one's self. But she takes her pleasure in such odd things; she is capable of marrying Mr. Osmond for his opinions. She wants to be disinterested: as if she were the only person who is in danger of not being so! Will he be so disinterested when he has the spending of her money? That was her idea before your father's death, and it has acquired new charms for her since. She ought to marry some one of whose disinterestedness she should be sure, herself; and there would be no such proof of that as his having a fortune of his own."

"My dear mother, I am not afraid," Ralph answered. "She is making fools of us all. She will please herself, of course; but she will do so by studying human nature and retaining her liberty. She has started on an exploring expedition, and I don't think she will change her course, at the outset, at a signal from Gilbert Osmond. She may have slackened speed for an hour, but before we know it she will be steaming away again. Excuse another metaphor."

Mrs. Touchett excused it perhaps, but she was not so much reassured as to withhold from Madame Merle the expression of her fears. "You who know everything," she said, "you must know this: whether that man is making love to my niece."

Madame Merle opened her expressive eyes, and with a brilliant smile—"Heaven help us," she exclaimed, "that's an idea!"

"Has it never occurred to you?"

"You make me feel like a fool—but I confess it hasn't. I wonder," added Madame Merle, "whether it has occurred to her."

"I think I will ask her," said Mrs. Touchett.

Madame Merle reflected a moment. "Don't put it into her head. The thing would be to ask Mr. Osmond."

"I can't do that," said Mrs. Touchett; "it's none of my business."

"I will ask him myself," Madame Merle declared, bravely.

"It's none of yours, either."

"That's precisely why I can afford to ask him; it is so much less my business than any one's else, that in me the question will not seem to him embarrassing."

"Pray let me know on the first day, then," said Mrs. Touchett. "If I can't speak to him, at least I can speak to her."

"Don't be too quick with her; don't inflame her imagination."

"I never did anything to any one's imagination. But I am always sure she will do something I don't like."

"You wouldn't like this," Madame Merle observed, without the point of interrogation.

"Why should I, pray? Mr. Osmond has nothing to offer."

Again Madame Merle was silent, while her thoughtful smile drew up her mouth more than usual toward the left corner. "Let us distinguish. Gilbert Osmond is certainly not the first comer. He is a man who under favourable circumstances might very well make an impression. He has made an impression, to my knowledge, more than once."

"Don't tell me about his love-affairs; they are nothing to me!" Mrs. Touchett cried. "What you say is precisely why I wish he would cease his visits. He has nothing in the world that I know of but a dozen or two of early masters and a grown up daughter."

"The early masters are worth a good deal of money," said Madame Merle, "and the daughter is a very young and very harmless person."

"In other words, she is an insipid school-girl. Is that what you mean? Having no fortune, she can't hope to marry, as they marry here; so that Isabel will have to furnish her either with a maintenance or with a dowry."

"Isabel probably would not object to being kind to her. I think she likes the child."

"Another reason for Mr. Osmond stopping at home! Otherwise, a week hence, we shall have Isabel arriving at the conviction that her mission in life is to prove that a stepmother may sacrifice herself—and that, to prove it, she must first become one."

"She would make a charming stepmother," said Madame Merle, smiling; "but I quite agree with you that she had better not decide upon her mission too hastily. Changing one's mission is often awkward! I will investigate and report to you."

All this went on quite over Isabel's head; she had no suspicion that her relations with Mr. Osmond were being discussed. Madame Merle had said nothing to put her on her guard; she alluded no more pointedly to Mr. Osmond than to the other gentlemen of Florence, native and foreign, who came in considerable numbers to pay their respects to Miss Archer's aunt. Isabel thought him very pleasant; she liked to think of him. She had carried away an image from her visit to his hill-top which her subsequent knowledge of him did nothing to efface and which happened to take her fancy particularly—the image of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arno, and holding by the hand a little girl whose sympathetic docility gave a new aspect to childhood. The picture was not brilliant, but she liked its lowness of tone, and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it. It seemed to tell a story—a story of the sort that touched her most easily; to speak of a serious choice, a choice between things of a shallow, and things of a deep, interest; of a lonely, studious life in a lovely land; of an old sorrow that sometimes ached to-day; a feeling of pride that was perhaps exaggerated, but that had an element of nobleness; a care for beauty and perfection so natural and so cultivated together, that it had been the main occupation of a lifetime of which the arid places were watered with the sweet sense of a quaint, half-anxious, half-helpless fatherhood. At the Palazzo Crescentini Mr. Osmond's manner remained the same; shy at first, and full of the effort (visible only to a sympathetic eye) to overcome this disadvantage; an effort which usually resulted in a great deal of easy, lively, very positive, rather aggressive, and always effective, talk. Mr. Osmond's talk was not injured by the indication of an eagerness to shine; Isabel found no difficulty in believing that a person was sincere who had so many of the signs of strong conviction—as, for instance, an explicit and graceful appreciation of anything that might be said on his own side, said perhaps by Miss Archer in particular. What continued to please this young lady was his extraordinary subtlety. There was such a fine intellectual intention in what he said, and the movement of his wit was like that of a quick-flashing blade. One

day he brought his little daughter with him, and Isabel was delighted to renew acquaintance with the child, who, as she presented her forehead to be kissed by every member of the circle, reminded her vividly of an *ingénue* in a French play. Isabel had never seen a young girl of this pattern; American girls were very different—different too were the daughters of England. This young lady was so neat, so complete in her manner; and yet in character, as one could see, so innocent and infantine. She sat on the sofa, by Isabel; she wore a small grenadine mantle and a pair of the useful gloves that Madame Merle had given her—little grey gloves, with a single button. She was like a sheet of blank paper—the ideal *jeune fille* of foreign fiction. Isabel hoped that so fair and smooth a page would be covered with an edifying text.

The Countess Gemini also came to call upon her, but the Countess was quite another affair. She was by no means a blank sheet; she had been written over in a variety of hands, and Mrs. Touchett, who felt by no means honoured by her visit, declared that a number of unmistakable blots were to be seen upon her surface. The Countess Gemini was indeed the occasion of a slight discussion between the mistress of the house and the visitor from Rome, in which Madame Merle (who was not such a fool as to irritate people by always agreeing with them) availed herself humourously of that large license of dissent which her hostess permitted as freely as she practised it. Mrs. Touchett had pronounced it a piece of audacity that the Countess Gemini should have presented herself at this time of day at the door of a house in which she was esteemed so little as she must long have known herself to be at the Palazzo Crescentini. Isabel had been made acquainted with the estimate which prevailed under this roof; it represented Mr. Osmond's sister as a kind of flighty reprobate. She had been married by her mother—a heartless featherhead like herself, with an appreciation of foreign titles which the daughter, to do her justice, had probably by this time thrown off—to an Italian nobleman who had perhaps given her some excuse for attempting to quench the consciousness of neglect. The Countess, however, had consoled herself too well, and it was notorious in Florence that she had consoled others also. Mrs. Touchett had never consented

to receive her, though the Countess had made overtures of old. Florence was not an austere city; but, as Mrs. Touchett said, she had to draw the line somewhere.

Madame Merle defended the unhappy lady with a great deal of zeal and wit. She could not see why Mrs. Touchett should make a scapegoat of that poor Countess, who had really done no harm, who had only done good in the wrong way. One must certainly draw the line, but while one was about it one should draw it straight; it was a very crooked chalk-mark that would exclude the Countess Gemini. In that case Mrs. Touchett had better shut up her house; this perhaps would be the best course so long as she remained in Florence. One must be fair and not make arbitrary differences; the Countess had doubtless been imprudent; she had not been so clever as other women. She was a good creature, not clever at all; but since when had that been a ground of exclusion from the best society? It was a long time since one had heard anything about her, and there could be no better proof of her having renounced the error of her ways than her desire to become a member of Mrs. Touchett's circle. Isabel could contribute nothing to this interesting dispute, not even a patient attention; she contented herself with having given a friendly welcome to the Countess Gemini, who, whatever her defects, had at least the merit of being Mr. Osmond's sister. As she liked the brother, Isabel thought it proper to try and like the sister; in spite of the growing perplexity of things she was still perfectly capable of these rather primitive sequences of feeling. She had not received the happiest impression of the Countess on meeting her at the villa, but she was thankful for an opportunity to repair this accident. Had not Mr. Osmond declared that she was a good woman? To have proceeded from Gilbert Osmond, this was rather a rough statement; but Madame Merle bestowed upon it a certain improving polish. She told Isabel more about the poor Countess than Mr. Osmond had done, and related the history of her marriage and its consequences. The Count was a member of an ancient Tuscan family, but so poor that he had been glad to accept Amy Osmond, in spite of her being no beauty, with the modest dowry her mother was able to offer—a sum about equivalent to that which

had already formed her brother's share of their patrimony. Count Gemini, since then, however, had inherited money, and now they were well enough off, as Italians went, though Amy was horribly extravagant. The Count was a low-lived brute; he had given his wife every excuse. She had no children; she had lost three within a year of their birth. Her mother, who had pretensions to "culture," wrote descriptive poems, and corresponded on Italian subjects with the English weekly journals—her mother had died three years after the Countess's marriage, the father having died long before. One could see this in Gilbert Osmond, Madame Merle thought—see that he had been brought up by a woman; though to do him justice, one would suppose it had been by a more sensible woman than the American Corinne, as Mrs. Osmond liked to be called. She had brought her children to Italy after her husband's death, and Mrs. Touchett remembered her during the years that followed her arrival. She thought her a horrible snob; but this was an irregularity of judgment on Mrs. Touchett's part, for she, like Mrs. Osmond, approved of political marriages. The Countess was very good company, and not such a fool as she seemed; one got on with her perfectly if one observed a single simple condition—that of not believing a word she said. Madame Merle had always made the best of her for her brother's sake; he always appreciated any kindness shown to Amy, because (if it had to be confessed for him) he was rather ashamed of her. Naturally, he couldn't like her style, her loudness, her want of repose. She displeased him; she acted on his nerves; she was not *his* sort of woman. What was his sort of woman? Oh, the opposite of the Countess, a woman who should always speak the truth. Isabel was unable to estimate the number of fibs her visitor had told her; the Countess indeed had given her an impression of rather silly sincerity. She had talked almost exclusively about herself; how much she should like to know Miss Archer; how thankful she should be for a real friend; how nasty the people in Florence were; how tired she was of the place; how much she should like to live somewhere else—in Paris, or London, or St. Petersburg; how impossible it was to get anything nice to wear in Italy, except a little old lace; how dear the world

was growing everywhere; what a life of suffering and privation she had led. Madame Merle listened with interest to Isabel's account of her conversation with this plaintive butterfly; but she had not needed it to feel exempt from anxiety. On the whole, she was not afraid of the Countess, and she could afford to do what was altogether best—not to appear so.

Isabel had another visitor, whom it was not, even behind her back, so easy a matter to patronise. Henrietta Stackpole, who had left Paris after Mrs. Touchett's departure for San Remo and had worked her way down, as she said, through the cities of North Italy, arrived in Florence about the middle of May. Madame Merle surveyed her with a single glance, comprehended her, and, after a moment's concentrated reflection, determined to like her. She determined, indeed, to delight in her. To like her was impossible; but the intenser sentiment might be managed. Madame Merle managed it beautifully, and Isabel felt that in foreseeing this event she had done justice to her friend's breadth of mind. Henrietta's arrival had been announced by Mr. Bantling, who, coming down from Nice while she was at Venice, and expecting to find her in Florence, which she had not yet reached, came to the Palazzo Crescentini to express his disappointment. Henrietta's own advent occurred two days later, and produced in Mr. Bantling an emotion amply accounted for by the fact that he had not seen her since the termination of the episodes at Versailles. The humorous view of his situation was generally taken, but it was openly expressed only by Ralph Touchett, who, in the privacy of his own apartment, when Bantling smoked a cigar there, indulged in Heaven knows what genial pleasantries on the subject of the incisive Miss Stackpole and her British ally. This gentleman took the joke in perfectly good part, and artlessly confessed that he regarded the affair as an intellectual flirtation. He liked Miss Stackpole extremely; he thought she had a wonderful head on her shoulders, and found great comfort in the society of a woman who was not perpetually thinking about what would be said and how it would look. Miss Stackpole never cared how it looked, and if she didn't care, pray why should he? But his curiosity had been roused; he wanted awfully to see whether she ever would care. He was pre-

pared to go as far as she—he did not see why he should stop first.

Henrietta showed no signs of stopping at all. Her prospects, as we know, had brightened upon her leaving England, and she was now in the full enjoyment of her copious resources. She had indeed been obliged to sacrifice her hopes with regard to the inner life; the social question, on the continent, bristled with difficulties even more numerous than those she had encountered in England. But on the continent there was the outer life, which was palpable and visible at every turn, and more easily convertible to literary uses than the customs of those opaque islanders. Out of doors, in foreign lands, as Miss Stackpole ingeniously remarked, one seemed to see the right side of the tapestry; out of doors, in England, one seemed to see the wrong side, which gave one no notion of the figure. It is mortifying to be obliged to confess it, but Henrietta, despairing of more occult things, was now paying much attention to the outer life. She had been studying it for two months at Venice, from which city she sent to the *Interviewer* a conscientious account of the gondolas, the Piazza, the Bridge of Sighs, the pigeons and the young boatman who chanted Tasso. The *Interviewer* was perhaps disappointed, but Henrietta was at least seeing Europe. Her present purpose was to get down to Rome before the malaria should come on—she apparently supposed that it began on a fixed day; and with this design she was to spend at present but few days in Florence. Mr. Bantling was to go with her to Rome, and she pointed out to Isabel that as he had been there before, as he was a military man, and as he had a classical education—he was brought up at Eton, where they study nothing but Latin, said Miss Stackpole—he would be a most useful companion in the city of the Cæsars. At this juncture Ralph had the happy iddea of proposing to Isabel that she also, under his own escort, should make a pilgrimage to Rome. She expected to pass a portion of the next winter there—that was very well; but meantime there was no harm in surveying the field. There were ten days left of the beautiful month of May—the most precious month of all to the true Rome-lover. Isabel would become a Rome-lover; that was a foregone conclusion. She was provided

with a well-tested companion of her own sex, whose society, thanks to the fact that she had other calls upon her sympathy, would probably not be oppressive. Madame Merle would remain with Mrs. Touchett; she had left Rome for the summer and would not care to return. This lady professed herself delighted to be left at peace in Florence; she had locked up her apartment and sent her cook home to Palestrina. She urged Isabel, however, to assent to Ralph's proposal, and assured her that a good introduction to Rome was not a thing to be despised. Isabel, in truth, needed no urging, and the party of four arranged its little journey. Mrs. Touchett, on this occasion, had resigned herself to the absence of a duenna; we have seen that she now inclined to the belief that her niece should stand alone.

Isabel saw Gilbert Osmond before she started, and mentioned her intention to him.

"I should like to be in Rome with you," he said; "I should like to see you there."

She hesitated a moment.

"You might come, then."

"But you'll have a lot of people with you."

"Ah," Isabel admitted, "of course I shall not be alone."

For a moment he said nothing more.

"You'll like it," he went on, at last. "They have spoiled it, but you'll like it."

"Ought I to dislike it, because it's spoiled?" she asked.

"No, I think not. It has been spoiled so often. If I were to go, what should I do with my little girl?"

"Can't you leave her at the villa?"

"I don't know that I like that—though there is a very good old woman who looks after her. I can't afford a governess."

"Bring her with you, then," said Isabel, smiling.

Mr. Osmond looked grave.

"She has been in Rome all winter, at her convent; and she is too young to make journeys of pleasure."

"You don't like bringing her forward?" Isabel suggested.

"No, I think young girls should be kept out of the world."

"I was brought up on a different system."

"You? Oh, with you it succeeded, because you—you were exceptional."

"I don't see why," said Isabel, who, however, was not sure there was not some truth in the speech.

Mr. Osmond did not explain; he simply went on. "If I thought it would make her resemble you to join a social group in Rome, I would take her there to-morrow."

"Don't make her resemble me," said Isabel; "keep her like herself."

"I might send her to my sister," Mr. Osmond suggested. He had almost the air of asking advice; he seemed to like to talk over his domestic matters with Isabel.

"Yes," said the girl; "I think that would not do much towards making her resemble me!"

After she had left Florence, Gilbert Osmond met Madame Merle at the Countess Gemini's. There were other people present; the Countess's drawing-room was usually well filled, and the talk had been general; but after a while Osmond left his place and came and sat on an ottoman half-behind, half-beside, Madame Merle's chair.

"She wants me to go to Rome with her," he announced, in a low voice.

"To go with her?"

"To be there while she is there. She proposed it."

"I suppose you mean that you proposed it, and that she assented."

"Of course I gave her a chance. But she is encouraging—she is very encouraging."

"I am glad to hear it—but don't cry victory too soon. Of course you will go to Rome."

"Ah," said Osmond, "It makes one work, this idea of yours!"

"Don't pretend you don't enjoy it—you are very ungrateful. You have not been so well occupied these many years."

"The way you take it is beautiful," said Osmond. "I ought to be grateful for that."

"Not too much so, however," Madame Merle answered. She talked with her usual smile, leaning back in her chair, and looking round the room. "You have made a very good impression, and I have seen for myself that you have re-

ceived one. You have not come to Mrs. Touchett's seven times to oblige me."

"The girl is not disagreeable," Osmond quietly remarked.

Madame Merle dropped her eye on him a moment, during which her lips closed with a certain firmness.

"Is that all you can find to say about that fine creature?"

"All? Isn't it enough? Of how many people have you heard me say more?"

She made no answer to this, but still presented her conversational smile to the room.

"You're unfathomable," she murmured at last. "I am frightened at the abyss into which I shall have dropped her!"

Osmond gave a laugh.

"You can't draw back—you have gone too far."

"Very good; but you must do the rest yourself."

"I shall do it," said Osmond.

Madame Merle remained silent, and he changed his place again; but when she rose to go he also took leave. Mrs. Touchett's victoria was awaiting her in the court, and after he had helped Madame Merle into it he stood there detaining her.

"You are very indiscreet," she said, rather wearily; "you should not have moved when I did."

He had taken off his hat; he passed his hand over his forehead.

"I always forget; I am out of the habit."

"You are quite unfathomable," she repeated, glancing up at the windows of the house; a modern structure in the new part of the town.

He paid no heed to this remark, but said to Madame Merle, with a considerable appearance of earnestness—

"She is really very charming; I have scarcely known any one more graceful."

"I like to hear you say that. The better you like her, the better for me."

"I like her very much. She is all you said, and into the bargain she is capable of great devotion. She has only one fault."

"What is that?"

"She has too many ideas."

"I warned you she was clever."

"Fortunately they are very bad ones," said Osmond.

"Why is that fortunate?"

"*Dame,* if they must be sacrificed!"

Madame Merle leaned back, looking straight before her; then she spoke to the coachman. But Osmond again detained her.

"If I go to Rome, what shall I do with Pansy?"

"I will go and see her," said Madame Merle.

CHAPTER XXVII

I SHALL not undertake to give an account of Isabel's impressions of Rome, to analyse her feelings as she trod the ancient pavement of the Forum, or to number her pulsations as she crossed the threshold of St. Peter's. It is enough to say that her perception of the endless interest of the place was such as might have been expected in a young woman of her intelligence and culture. She had always been fond of history, and here was history in the stones of the street and the atoms of the sunshine. She had an imagination that kindled at the mention of great deeds, and wherever she turned some great deed had been acted. These things excited her, but she was quietly excited. It seemed to her companions that she spoke less than usual, and Ralph Touchett, when he appeared to be looking listlessly and awkwardly over her head, was really dropping an eye of observation upon her. To her own knowledge she was very happy; she would even have been willing to believe that these were to be on the whole the happiest hours of her life. The sense of the mighty human past was heavy upon her, but it was interfused in the strangest, suddenest, most capricious way, with the fresh, cool breath of the future. Her feelings were so mingled that she scarcely knew whither any of them would lead her, and she went about in a kind of repressed ecstasy of contemplation, seeing often in the things she looked at a great deal more than was there, and yet not seeing many of the items enumerated in "Murray." Rome, as Ralph said, was in capital condition. The herd of re-echoing tourists had departed, and most of the solemn places had relapsed into solemnity. The sky was a blaze of blue, and the plash of the fountains, in their mossy niches, had lost its chill and doubled its music. On the corners of the warm, bright streets one stumbled upon bundles of flowers.

Our friends had gone one afternoon—it was the third of their stay—to look at the latest excavations in the Forum;

these labours having been for some time previous largely extended. They had gone down from the modern street to the level of the Sacred Way, along which they wandered with a reverence of step which was not the same on the part of each. Henrietta Stackpole was struck with the fact that ancient Rome had been paved a good deal like New York, and even found an analogy between the deep chariot-ruts which are traceable in the antique street, and the iron grooves which mark the course of the American horse-car. The sun had begun to sink, the air was filled with a golden haze, and the long shadows of broken column and formless pedestal were thrown across the field of ruin. Henrietta wandered away with Mr. Bantling, in whose Latin reminiscences she was apparently much engrossed, and Ralph addressed such elucidations as he was prepared to offer, to the attentive ear of our heroine. One of the humble archæologists who hover about the place had put himself at the disposal of the two, and repeated his lesson with a fluency which the decline of the season had done nothing to impair. A process of digging was going on in a remote corner of the Forum, and he presently remarked that if it should please the *signori* to go and watch it a little, they might see something interesting. The proposal commended itself more to Ralph than to Isabel, who was weary with much wandering; so that she charged her companion to satisfy his curiosity while she patiently awaited his return. The hour and the place were much to her taste, and she should enjoy being alone. Ralph accordingly went off with the cicerone, while Isabel sat down on a prostrate column, near the foundations of the Capitol. She desired a quarter of an hour's solitude, but she was not long to enjoy it. Keen as was her interest in the rugged relics of the Roman past that lay scattered around her, and in which the corrosion of centuries had still left so much of individual life, her thoughts, after resting a while on these things, had wandered, by a concatenation of stages it might require some subtlety to trace, to regions and objects more contemporaneous. From the Roman past to Isabel Archer's future was a long stride, but her imagination had taken it in a single flight, and now hovered in slow circles over the nearer and richer field. She was so absorbed

in her thoughts, as she bent her eyes upon a row of cracked but not dislocated slabs covering the ground at her feet, that she had not heard the sound of approaching footsteps before a shadow was thrown across the line of her vision. She looked up and saw a gentleman—a gentleman who was not Ralph come back to say that the excavations were a bore. This personage was startled as she was startled; he stood there, smiling a little, blushing a good deal, and raising his hat.

"Lord Warburton!" Isabel exclaimed, getting up.

"I had no idea it was you," he said. "I turned that corner and came upon you."

Isabel looked about her.

"I am alone, but my companions have just left me. My cousin is gone to look at the digging over there."

"Ah yes; I see." And Lord Warburton's eyes wandered vaguely in the direction Isabel had indicated. He stood firmly before her; he had stopped smiling; he folded his arms with a kind of deliberation. "Don't let me disturb you," he went on, looking at her dejected pillar. "I am afraid you are tired."

"Yes, I am rather tired." She hesitated a moment, and then she sat down. "But don't let me interrupt you," she added.

"Oh dear, I am quite alone, I have nothing on earth to do. I had no idea you were in Rome. I have just come from the East. I am only passing through."

"You have been making a long journey," said Isabel, who had learned from Ralph that Lord Warburton was absent from England.

"Yes, I came abroad for six months—soon after I saw you last. I have been in Turkey and Asia Minor; I came the other day from Athens." He spoke with visible embarrassment; this unexpected meeting caused him an emotion he was unable to conceal. He looked at Isabel a moment, and then he said, abruptly—"Do you wish me to leave you, or will you let me stay a little?"

She looked up at him, gently. "I don't wish you to leave me, Lord Warburton; I am very glad to see you."

"Thank you for saying that. May I sit down?"

The fluted shaft on which Isabel had taken her seat would have afforded a resting-place to several persons, and there was plenty of room even for a highly-developed Englishman. This fine specimen of that great class seated himself near our young lady, and in the course of five minutes he had asked her several questions, taken rather at random, and of which, as he asked some of them twice over, he apparently did not always heed the answer; had given her, too, some information about himself which was not wasted upon her calmer feminine sense. Lord Warburton, though he tried hard to seem easy, was agitated; he repeated more than once that he had not expected to meet her, and it was evident that the encounter touched him in a way that would have made preparation advisable. He had abrupt alternations of gaiety and gravity; he appeared at one moment to seek his neighbour's eye and at the next to avoid it. He was splendidly sunburnt; even his multitudinous beard seemed to have been burnished by the fire of Asia. He was dressed in the loosefitting, heterogeneous garments in which the English traveller in foreign lands is wont to consult his comfort and affirm his nationality; and with his clear grey eye, his bronzed complexion, fresh beneath its brownness, his manly figure, his modest manner, and his general air of being a gentleman and an explorer, he was such a representative of the British race as need not in any clime have been disavowed by those who have a kindness for it. Isabel noted these things, and was glad she had always liked Lord Warburton. He was evidently as likeable as before, and the tone of his voice, which she had formerly thought delightful, was as good as an assurance that he would never change for the worse. They talked about the matters that were naturally in order; her uncle's death, Ralph's state of health, the way she had passed her winter, her visit to Rome, her return to Florence, her plans for the summer, the hotel she was staying at; and then Lord Warburton's own adventures, movements, intentions, impressions and present domicile. At last there was a silence, and she knew what he was thinking of. His eyes were fixed on the ground; but at last he raised them and said gravely—"I have written to you several times."

"Written to me? I have never got your letters."

"I never sent them. I burned them up."

"Ah," said Isabel with a laugh, "it was better that you should do that than I!"

"I thought you wouldn't care about them," he went on, with a simplicity that might have touched her. "It seemed to me that after all I had no right to trouble you with letters."

"I should have been very glad to have news of you. You know that I hoped that—that—" Isabel stopped; it seemed to her there would be a certain flatness in the utterance of her thought.

"I know what you are going to say. You hoped we should always remain good friends." This formula, as Lord Warburton uttered it, was certainly flat enough; but then he was interested in making it appear so.

Isabel found herself reduced simply to saying—"Please don't talk of all that;" a speech which hardly seemed to her an improvement on the other.

"It's a small consolation to allow me!" Lord Warburton exclaimed, with force.

"I can't pretend to console you," said the girl, who, as she sat there, found it good to think that she had given him the answer that had satisfied him so little six months before. He was pleasant, he was powerful, he was gallant, there was no better man than he. But her answer remained.

"It's very well you don't try to console me; it would not be in your power," she heard him say, through the medium of her quickened reflections.

"I hoped we should meet again, because I had no fear you would attempt to make me feel I had wronged you. But when you do that—the pain is greater than the pleasure." And Isabel got up, looking for her companions.

"I don't want to make you feel that; of course I can't say that. I only just want you to know one or two things, in fairness to myself as it were. I won't return to the subject again. I felt very strongly what I expressed to you last year; I couldn't think of anything else. I tried to forget—energetically, systematically. I tried to take an interest in some one else. I tell you this because I want you to know

I did my duty. I didn't succeed. It was for the same purpose I went abroad—as far away as possible. They say travelling distracts the mind; but it didn't distract mine. I have thought of you perpetually, ever since I last saw you. I am exactly the same. I love you just as much, and everything I said to you then is just as true. However, I don't mean to trouble you now; it's only for a moment. I may add that when I came upon you a moment since, without the smallest idea of seeing you, I was in the very act of wishing I knew where you were."

He had recovered his self-control, as I say, and while he spoke it became complete. He spoke plainly and simply, in a low tone of voice, in a matter-of-fact way. There might have been something impressive, even to a woman of less imagination than the one he addressed, in hearing this brilliant, brave-looking gentleman express himself so modestly and reasonably.

"I have often thought of you, Lord Warburton," Isabel answered. "You may be sure I shall always do that." And then she added, with a smile—"There is no harm in that, on either side."

They walked along together, and she asked kindly about his sisters and requested him to let them know she had done so. He said nothing more about his own feelings, but returned to those more objective topics they had already touched upon. Presently he asked her when she was to leave Rome, and on her mentioning the limit of her stay, declared he was glad it was still so distant.

"Why do you say that, if you yourself are only passing through?" she inquired, with some anxiety.

"Ah, when I said I was passing through, I didn't mean that one would treat Rome as if it were Clapham Junction. To pass through Rome is to stop a week or two."

"Say frankly that you mean to stay as long as I do!"

Lord Warburton looked at her a moment, with an uncomfortable smile. "You won't like that. You are afraid you will see too much of me."

"It doesn't matter what I like. I certainly can't expect you to leave this delightful place on my account. But I confess I am afraid of you."

"Afraid I will begin again? I promise to be very careful."

They had gradually stopped, and they stood a moment face to face. "Poor Lord Warburton!" said Isabel, with a melancholy smile.

"Poor Lord Warburton, indeed! But I will be careful."

"You may be unhappy, but you shall not make me so. That I can't allow."

"If I believed I could make you unhappy, I think I should try it." At this she walked in advance, and he also proceeded. "I will never say a word to displease you," he promised, very gently.

"Very good. If you do, our friendship's at an end."

"Perhaps some day—after a while—you will give me leave," he suggested.

"Give you leave—to make me unhappy?"

He hesitated. "To tell you again—" But he checked himself. "I will be silent," he said; "silent always."

Ralph Touchett had been joined, in his visit to the excavation, by Miss Stackpole and her attendant, and these three, now emerged from among the mounds of earth and stone collected round the aperture, and came into sight of Isabel and her companion. Ralph Touchett gave signs of greeting to Lord Warburton, and Henrietta exclaimed in a high voice, "Gracious, there's that lord!" Ralph and his friend met each other with undemonstrative cordiality, and Miss Stackpole rested her large intellectual gaze upon the sunburnt traveller.

"I don't suppose you remember me, sir," she soon remarked.

"Indeed I do remember you," said Lord Warburton. "I asked you to come and see me, and you never came."

"I don't go everywhere I am asked," Miss Stackpole answered, coldly.

"Ah well, I won't ask you again," said the master of Lockleigh, good-humouredly.

"If you do I will go; so be sure!"

Lord Warburton, for all his good-humour, seemed sure enough. Mr. Bantling had stood by, without claiming a recognition, but he now took occasion to nod to his lord-

ship, who answered him with a friendly "Oh, you here, Bantling?" and a hand-shake.

"Well," said Henrietta, "I didn't know you knew him!"

"I guess you don't know every one I know," Mr. Bantling rejoined, facetiously.

"I thought that when an Englishman knew a lord he always told you."

"Ah, I am afraid Bantling was ashamed of me," said Lord Warburton, laughing. Isabel was glad to hear him laugh; she gave a little sigh of relief as they took their way homeward.

The next day was Sunday; she spent her morning writing two long letters—one to her sister Lily, the other to Madame Merle; but in neither of these epistles did she mention the fact that a rejected suitor had threatened her with another appeal. Of a Sunday afternoon all good Romans (and the best Romans are often the northern barbarians) follow the custom of going to hear vespers at St. Peter's; and it had been agreed among our friends that they would drive together to the great church. After lunch, an hour before the carriage came, Lord Warburton presented himself at the Hôtel de Paris and paid a visit to the two ladies, Ralph Touchett and Mr. Bantling having gone out together. The visitor seemed to have wished to give Isabel an example of his intention to keep the promise he had made her the evening before; he was both discreet and frank; he made not even a tacit appeal, but left it for her to judge what a mere good friend he could be. He talked about his travels, about Persia, about Turkey, and when Miss Stackpole asked him whether it would "pay" for her to visit those countries, assured her that they offered a great field to female enterprise. Isabel did him justice, but she wondered what his purpose was, and what he expected to gain even by behaving heroically. If he expected to melt her by showing what a good fellow he was, he might spare himself the trouble. She knew already he was a good fellow, and nothing he could do would add to this conviction. Moreover, his being in Rome at all made her vaguely uneasy. Nevertheless, when on bringing his call to a close, he said that he too should be at St. Peter's and should look out for Isabel and her friends,

she was obliged to reply that it would be a pleasure to see him again.

In the church, as she strolled over its tesselated acres, he was the first person she encountered. She had not been one of the superior tourists who are "disappointed" in St. Peter's and find it smaller than its fame; the first time she passed beneath the huge leathern curtain that strains and bangs at the entrance—the first time she found herself beneath the far-arching dome and saw the light drizzle down through the air thickened with incense and with the reflections of marble and gilt, of mosaic and bronze, her conception of greatness received an extension. After this it never lacked space to soar. She gazed and wondered, like a child or a peasant, and paid her silent tribute to visible grandeur. Lord Warburton walked beside her and talked of Saint Sophia of Constantinople; she was afraid that he would end by calling attention to his exemplary conduct. The service had not yet begun, but at St. Peter's there is much to observe, and as there is something almost profane in the vastness of the place, which seems meant as much for physical as for spiritual exercise, the different figures and groups, the mingled worshippers and spectators, may follow their various intentions without mutual scandal. In that splendid immensity individual indiscretion carries but a short distance. Isabel and her companions, however, were guilty of none; for though Henrietta was obliged to declare that Michael Angelo's dome suffered by comparison with that of the Capitol at Washington, she addressed her protest chiefly to Mr. Bantling's ear, and reserved it, in its more accentuated form, for the columns of the *Interviewer*. Isabel made the circuit of the church with Lord Warburton, and as they drew near the choir on the left of the entrance the voices of the Pope's singers were borne towards them over the heads of the large number of persons clustered outside the doors. They paused a while on the skirts of this crowd, composed in equal measure of Roman cockneys and inquisitive strangers, and while they stood there the sacred concert went forward. Ralph, with Henrietta and Mr. Bantling, was apparently within, where Isabel, above the heads of the dense group in front of her, saw the afternoon light, silvered by

clouds of incense that seemed to mingle with the splendid chant, sloping through the embossed recesses of high windows. After a while the singing stopped, and then Lord Warburton seemed disposed to turn away again. Isabel for a moment did the same; whereupon she found herself confronted with Gilbert Osmond, who appeared to have been standing at a short distance behind her. He now approached with a formal salutation.

"So you decided to come?" she said, putting out her hand.

"Yes, I came last night, and called this afternoon at your hotel. They told me you had come here, and I looked about for you."

"The others are inside," said Isabel.

"I didn't come for the others." Gilbert Osmond murmured, smiling.

She turned away; Lord Warburton was looking at them; perhaps he had heard this. Suddenly she remembered that it was just what he had said to her the morning he came to Gardencourt to ask her to marry him. Mr. Osmond's words had brought the colour to her cheek, and this reminiscence had not the effect of dispelling it. Isabel sought refuge from her slight agitation in mentioning to each gentleman the name of the other, and fortunately at this moment Mr. Bantling made his way out of the choir, cleaving the crowd with British valour, and followed by Miss Stackpole and Ralph Touchett. I say fortunately, but this is perhaps a superficial view of the matter; for on perceiving the gentleman from Florence, Ralph Touchett exhibited symptoms of surprise which might not perhaps have seemed flattering to Mr. Osmond. It must be added, however, that these manifestations were momentary, and Ralph was presently able to say to his cousin, with due jocularity, that she would soon have all her friends about her. His greeting to Mr. Osmond was apparently frank; that is, the two men shook hands and looked at each other. Miss Stackpole had met the newcomer in Florence, but she had already found occasion to say to Isabel that she liked him no better than her other admirers —than Mr. Touchett, Lord Warburton, and little Mr. Rosier in Paris. "I don't know what it is in you," she had been

pleased to remark, "but for a nice girl you do attract the most unpleasant people. Mr. Goodwood is the only one I have any respect for, and he's just the one you don't appreciate."

"What's your opinion of St. Peter's?" Mr. Osmond asked of Isabel.

"It's very large and very bright," said the girl.

"It's too large; it makes one feel like an atom."

"Is not that the right way to feel—in a church?" Isabel asked, with a faint but interested smile.

"I suppose it's the right way to feel everywhere, when one *is* nobody. But I like it in a church as little as anywhere else."

"You ought indeed to be a Pope!" Isabel exclaimed, remembering something he had said to her in Florence.

"Ah, I should have enjoyed that!" said Gilbert Osmond.

Lord Warburton meanwhile had joined Ralph Touchett, and the two strolled away together.

"Who is the gentleman speaking to Miss Archer?" his lordship inquired.

"His name is Gilbert Osmond—he lives in Florence," Ralph said.

"What is he besides?"

"Nothing at all. Oh yes, he is an American; but one forgets that; he is so little of one."

"Has he known Miss Archer long?"

"No, about a fortnight."

"Does she like him?"

"Yes, I think she does."

"Is he a good fellow?"

Ralph hesitated a moment. "No, he's not," he said, at last.

"Why then does she like him?" pursued Lord Warburton, with noble *naïveté*.

"Because she's a woman."

Lord Warburton was silent a moment. "There are other men who *are* good fellows," he presently said, "and them—them——"

"And them she likes also!" Ralph interrupted, smiling.

"Oh, if you mean she likes him in that way!" And Lord Warburton turned round again. As far as he was con-

cerned, however, the party was broken up. Isabel remained in conversation with the gentleman from Florence till they left the church, and her English lover consoled himself by lending such attention as he might to the strains which continued to proceed from the choir.

CHAPTER XXVIII

ON the morrow, in the evening, Lord Warburton went again to see his friends at their hotel, and at this establishment he learned that they had gone to the opera. He drove to the opera, with the idea of paying them a visit in their box, in accordance with the time-honoured Italian custom; and after he had obtained his admittance—it was one of the secondary theatres—looked about the large, bare, ill-lighted house. An act had just terminated, and he was at liberty to pursue his quest. After scanning two or three tiers of boxes, he perceived in one of the largest of these receptacles a lady whom he easily recognised. Miss Archer was seated facing the stage, and partly screened by the curtain of the box; and beside her, leaning back in his chair, was Mr. Gilbert Osmond. They appeared to have the place to themselves, and Warburton supposed that their companions had taken advantage of the *entr'acte* to enjoy the relative coolness of the lobby. He stood a while watching the interesting pair in the box, and asking himself whether he should go up and interrupt their harmonious colloquy. At last it became apparent that Isabel had seen him, and this accident determined him. He took his way to the upper regions, and on the staircase he met Ralph Touchett, slowly descending, with his hat in the attitude of ennui and his hands where they usually were.

"I saw you below a moment since, and was going down to you. I feel lonely and want company," Ralph remarked.

"You have some that is very good that you have deserted."

"Do you mean my cousin? Oh, she has got a visitor and doesn't want me. Then Miss Stackpole and Bantling have gone out to a café to eat an ice—Miss Stackpole delights in an ice. I didn't think they wanted me either. The opera is very bad; the women look like laundresses and sing like peacocks. I feel very low."

"You had better go home," Lord Warburton said, without affectation.

"And leave my young lady in this sad place? Ah no, I must watch over her."

"She seems to have plenty of friends."

"Yes, that's why I must watch," said Ralph, with the same low-voiced mock-melancholy.

"If she doesn't want you, it's probable she doesn't want me."

"No, you are different. Go to the box and stay there while I walk about."

Lord Warburton went to the box, where he received a very gracious welcome from the more attractive of its occupants. He exchanged greetings with Mr. Osmond, to whom he had been introduced the day before, and who, after he came in, sat very quietly, scarcely mingling in the somewhat disjointed talk in which Lord Warburton engaged with Isabel. It seemed to the latter gentleman that Miss Archer looked very pretty; he even thought she looked excited; as she was, however, at all times a keenly-glancing, quickly-moving, completely animated young woman, he may have been mistaken on this point. Her talk with him betrayed little agitation; it expressed a kindness so ingenious and deliberate as to indicate that she was in undisturbed possession of her faculties. Poor Lord Warburton had moments of bewilderment. She had discouraged him, formally, as much as a woman could; what business had she then to have such soft, reassuring tones in her voice? The others came back; the bare, familiar, trivial opera began again. The box was large, and there was room for Lord Warburton to remain if he would sit a little behind, in the dark. He did so for half-an-hour, while Mr. Osmond sat in front, leaning forward, with his elbows on his knees, just behind Isabel. Lord Warburton heard nothing, and from his gloomy corner saw nothing but the clear profile of this young lady, defined against the dim illumination of the house. When there was another interval no one moved. Mr. Osmond talked to Isabel, and Lord Warburton remained in his corner. He did so but for a short time, however; after which he got up and bade

good-night to the ladies. Isabel said nothing to detain him, and then he was puzzled again. Why had she so sweet a voice—such a friendly accent? He was angry with himself for being puzzled, and then angry for being angry. Verdi's music did little to comfort him, and he left the theatre and walked homeward, without knowing his way, through the tortuous, tragical streets of Rome, where heavier sorrows than his had been carried under the stars.

"What is the character of that gentleman?" Osmond asked of Isabel, after the visitor had gone.

"Irreproachable—don't you see it?"

"He owns about half England; that's his character," Henrietta remarked. "That's what they call a free country!"

"Ah, he is a great proprietor? Happy man!" said Gilbert Osmond.

"Do you call that happiness—the ownership of human beings?" cried Miss Stackpole. "He owns his tenants, and he has thousands of them. It is pleasant to own something, but inanimate objects are enough for me. I don't insist on flesh and blood, and minds and consciences."

"It seems to me you own a human being or two," Mr. Bantling suggested jocosely. "I wonder if Warburton orders his tenants about as you do me."

"Lord Warburton is a great radical," Isabel said. "He has very advanced opinions."

"He has very advanced stone walls. His park is inclosed by a gigantic iron fence, some thirty miles round," Henrietta announced, for the information of Mr. Osmond. "I should like him to converse with a few of our Boston radicals."

"Don't they approve of iron fences?" asked Mr. Bantling.

"Only to shut up wicked conservatives. I always feel as if I were talking to you over a fence!"

"Do you know him well, this unreformed reformer?" Osmond went on, questioning Isabel.

"Well enough."

"Do you like him?"

"Very much."

"Is he a man of ability?"

"Of excellent ability, and as good as he looks."

"As good as he is good-looking do you mean? He is very good-looking. How detestably fortunate! to be a great English magnate, to be clever and handsome into the bargain, and, by way of finishing off, to enjoy your favour! That's a man I could envy."

Isabel gave a serious smile.

"You seem to me to be always envying some one. Yesterday it was the Pope; to-day it's poor Lord Warburton."

"My envy is not dangerous; it is very platonic. Why do you call him poor?"

"Women usually pity men after they have hurt them; that is their way of showing kindness," said Ralph, joining in the conversation for the first time, with cynicism so transparently ingenuous as to be virtually innocent.

"Pray, have I hurt Lord Warburton?" Isabel asked, raising her eyebrows, as if the idea were perfectly novel.

"It serves him right if you have," said Henrietta, while the curtain rose for the ballet.

Isabel saw no more of her attributive victim for the next twenty-four hours, but on the second day after the visit to the opera she encountered him in the gallery of the Capitol, where he was standing before the lion of the collection, the statue of the Dying Gladiator. She had come in with her companions, among whom, on this occasion again, Gilbert Osmond was numbered, and the party, having ascended the staircase, entered the first and finest of the rooms. Lord Warburton spoke to her with all his usual geniality, but said in a moment that he was leaving the gallery.

"And I am leaving Rome," he added. "I should bid you good-bye."

I shall not undertake to explain why, but Isabel was sorry to hear it. It was, perhaps, because she had ceased to be afraid of his renewing his suit; she was thinking of something else. She was on the point of saying she was sorry, but she checked herself and simply wished him a happy journey.

He looked at her with a somewhat heavy eye.

"I am afraid you think me rather inconsistent," he said. "I told you the other day that I wanted so much to stay a while."

"Oh no; you could easily change your mind."

"That's what I have done."

"*Bon voyage*, then."

"You're in a great hurry to get rid of me," said his lordship, rather dismally.

"Not in the least. But I hate partings."

"You don't care what I do," he went on pitifully.

Isabel looked at him for a moment.

"Ah," she said, "you are not keeping your promise!"

He coloured like a boy of fifteen.

"If I am not, then it's because I can't; and that's why I am going."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye." He lingered still, however. "When shall I see you again?"

Isabel hesitated, and then, as if she had had a happy inspiration—"Some day after you are married."

"That will never be. It will be after you are."

"That will do as well," said Isabel, smiling.

"Yes, quite as well. Good-bye."

They shook hands, and he left her alone in the beautiful room, among the shining antique marbles. She sat down in the middle of the circle of statues, looking at them vaguely, resting her eyes on their beautiful blank faces; listening, as it were, to their eternal silence. It is impossible, in Rome at least, to look long at a great company of Greek sculptures without feeling the effect of their noble quietude. It soothes and moderates the spirit, it purifies the imagination. I say in Rome especially, because the Roman air is an exquisite medium for such impressions. The golden sunshine mingles with them, the great stillness of the past, so vivid yet, though it is nothing but a void full of names, seems to throw a solemn spell upon them. The blinds were partly closed in the windows of the Capitol, and a clear, warm shadow rested on the figures and made them more perfectly human. Isabel sat there a long time, under the charm of their motionless grace, seeing life between their gazing eyelids and purpose in their marble lips. The dark red walls of the room threw them into relief; the polished marble floor reflected their

beauty. She had seen them all before, but her enjoyment repeated itself, and it was all the greater because she was glad, for the time, to be alone. At the last her thoughts wandered away from them, solicited by images of a vitality more complete. An occasional tourist came into the room, stopped and stared a moment at the Dying Gladiator, and then passed out of the other door, creaking over the smooth pavement. At the end of half-an-hour Gilbert Osmond reappeared, apparently in advance of his companions. He strolled towards her slowly, with his hands behind him, and with his usual bright, inquiring, yet not appealing smile.

"I am surprised to find you alone," he said. "I thought you had company."

"So I have—the best." And Isabel glanced at the circle of sculpture.

"Do you call this better company than an English peer?"

"Ah, my English peer left me some time ago," said Isabel, getting up. She spoke, with intention, a little dryly.

Mr. Osmond noted her dryness, but it did not prevent him from giving a laugh.

"I am afraid that what I heard the other evening is true; you are rather cruel to that nobleman."

Isabel looked a moment at the vanquished Gladiator.

"It is not true. I am scrupulously kind."

"That's exactly what I mean!" Gilbert Osmond exclaimed, so humorously that his joke needs to be explained.

We knew that he was fond of originals, of rarities, of the superior, the exquisite; and now that he had seen Lord Warburton, whom he thought a very fine example of his race and order, he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by rejecting the splended offer of a British aristocrat. Gilbert Osmond had a high appreciation of the British aristocracy—he had never forgiven Providence for not making him an English duke—and could measure the unexpectedness of this conduct. It would be proper that the woman he should marry should have done something of that sort.

CHAPTER XXIX

RALPH TOUCHETT, for reasons best known to himself, had seen fit to say that Gilbert Osmond was not a good fellow; but this assertion was not borne out by the gentleman's conduct during the rest of the visit to Rome. He spent a portion of each day with Isabel and her companions, and gave every indication of being an easy man to live with. It was impossible not to feel that he had excellent points, and indeed this is perhaps why Ralph Touchett made his want of good fellowship a reproach to him. Even Ralph was obliged to admit that just now he was a delightful companion. His good humour was imperturbable, his knowledge universal, his manners were the gentlest in the world. His spirits were not visibly high; it was difficult to think of Gilbert Osmond as boisterous; he had a mortal dislike to loudness or eagerness. He thought Miss Archer sometimes too eager, too pronounced. It was a pity she had that fault; because if she had not had it she would really have had none; she would have been as bright and soft as an April cloud. If Osmond was not loud, however, he was deep, and during these closing days of the Roman May he had a gaiety that matched with slow irregular walks under the pines of the Villa Borghese, among the small sweet meadow flowers and the mossy marbles. He was pleased with everything; he had never before been pleased with so many things at once. Old impressions, old enjoyments, renewed themselves; one evening, going home to his room at the inn, he wrote down a little sonnet to which he prefixed the title of "Rome Revisited." A day or two later he showed this piece of correct and ingenious verse to Isabel, explaining to her that it was an Italian fashion to commemorate the pleasant occasions of life by a tribute to the muse. In general Osmond took his pleasure singly; he was usually disgusted with something that seemed to him ugly or offensive; his mind was rarely visited with moods of comprehensive satisfaction.

But at present he was happy—happier than he had perhaps ever been in his life; and the feeling had a large foundation. This was simply the sense of success—the most agreeable emotion of the human heart. Osmond had never had too much of it; in this respect he had never been spoiled; as he knew perfectly well and often reminded himself. "Ah no, I have not been spoiled; certainly I have not been spoiled," he used to repeat to himself. "If I do succeed before I die, I shall have earned it well." Absolutely void of success his career had not been; a very moderate amount of reflection would have assured him of this. But his triumphs were, some of them, now, too old; others had been too easy. The present one had been less difficult than might have been expected; but it had been easy—that is, it had been rapid—only because he had made an altogether exceptional effort, a greater effort than he had believed it was in him to make. The desire to succeed greatly—in something or other—had been the dream of his youth; but as the years went on, the conditions attached to success became so various and repulsive that the idea of making an effort gradually lost its charm. It was not dead, however; it only slept; it revived after he had made the acquaintance of Isabel Archer. Osmond had felt that any enterprise in which the chance of failure was at all considerable would never have an attraction for him; to fail would have been unspeakably odious, would have left an ineffaceable stain upon his life. Success was to seem in advance definitely certain—certain, that is, on this one condition, that the effort should be an agreeable one to make. That of exciting an interest on the part of Isabel Archer corresponded to this description, for the girl had pleased him from the first of his seeing her. We have seen that she thought him "fine"; and Gilbert Osmond returned the compliment. We have also seen (or heard) that he had a great dread of vulgarity, and on this score his mind was at rest with regard to our young lady. He was not afraid that she would disgust him or irritate him; he had no fear that she would even, in the more special sense of the word, displease him. If she was too eager, she could be taught to be less so; that was a fault which diminished with growing knowledge. She might defy him, she might anger

him; this was another matter from displeasing him, and on the whole a less serious one. If a woman were ungraceful and common, her whole quality was vitiated, and one could take no precautions against that; one's own delicacy would avail little. If, however, she were only wilful and high-tempered, the defect might be managed with comparative ease; for had one not a will of one's own that one had been keeping for years in the best condition—as pure and keen as a sword protected by its sheath?

Though I have tried to speak with extreme discretion, the reader may have gathered a suspicion that Gilbert Osmond was not untainted by selfishness. This is rather a coarse imputation to put upon a man of his refinement; and it behoves us at all times to remember the familiar proverb about those who live in glass houses. If Mr. Osmond was more selfish than most of his fellows, the fact will still establish itself. Lest it should fail to do so, I must decline to commit myself to an accusation so gross; the more especially as several of the items of our story would seem to point the other way. It is well known that there are few indications of selfishness more conclusive (on the part of a gentleman at least) than the preference for a single life. Gilbert Osmond, after having tasted of matrimony, had spent a succession of years in the full enjoyment of recovered singleness. He was familiar with the simplicity of purpose, the lonely liberties, of bachelorhood. He had reached that period of life when it is supposed to be doubly difficult to renounce these liberties, endeared as they are by long association; and yet he was prepared to make the generous sacrifice. It would seem that this might fairly be set down to the credit of the noblest of our qualities—the faculty of self-devotion. Certain it is that Osmond's desire to marry had been deep and distinct. It had not been notorious; he had not gone about asking people whether they knew a nice girl with a little money. Money was an object; but this was not his manner of proceeding, and no one knew—or even greatly cared—whether he wished to marry or not. Madame Merle knew—that we have already perceived. It was not that he had told her; on the whole he would not have cared to tell her. But there were things of which she had no need to be told—things as to which she

had a sort of creative intuition. She had recognised a truth that was none the less pertinent for being very subtle: the truth that there was something very imperfect in Osmond's situation as it stood. He was a failure, of course; that was an old story; to Madame Merle's perception he would always be a failure. But there were degrees of ineffectiveness, and there was no need of taking one of the highest. Success, for Gilbert Osmond, would be to make himself felt; that was the only success to which he could now pretend. It is not a kind of distinction that is officially recognised—unless indeed the operation be performed upon multitudes of men. Osmond's line would be to impress himself not largely but deeply; a distinction of the most private sort. A single character might offer the whole measure of it; the clear and sensitive nature of a generous girl would make space for the record. The record of course would be complete if the young lady should have a fortune, and Madame Merle would have taken no pains to make Mr. Osmond acquainted with Mrs. Touchett's niece if Isabel had been as scantily dowered as when first she met her. He had waited all these years because he wanted only the best, and a portionless bride naturally would not have been the best. He had waited so long in vain that he finally almost lost his interest in the subject —not having kept it up by venturesome experiments. It had become improbable that the best was now to be had, and if he wished to make himself felt, there was soft and supple little Pansy, who would evidently respond to the slightest pressure. When at last the best did present itself Osmond recognised it like a gentleman. There was therefore no incongruity in his wishing to marry—it was his own idea of success, as well as that which Madame Merle, with her old-time interest in his affairs, entertained for him. Let it not, however, be supposed that he was guilty of the error of believing that Isabel's character was of that passive sort which offers a free field for domination. He was sure that she would constantly act—act in the sense of enthusiastic concession.

Shortly before the time which had been fixed in advance for her return to Florence, this young lady received from Mrs. Touchett a telegram which ran as follows:—"Leave Florence 4th June, Bellaggio, and take you if you have not

other views. But can't wait if you dawdle in Rome." The dawdling in Rome was very pleasant, but Isabel had no other views, and she wrote to her aunt that she would immediately join her. She told Gilbert Osmond that she had done so, and he replied that, spending many of his summers as well as his winters in Italy, he himself would loiter a little longer among the Seven Hills. He should not return to Florence for ten days more, and in that time she would have started for Bellaggio. It might be long, in this case, before he should see her again. This conversation took place in the large decorated sitting-room which our friends occupied at the hotel; it was late in the evening, and Ralph Touchett was to take his cousin back to Florence on the morrow. Osmond had found the girl alone; Miss Stackpole had contracted a friendship with a delightful American family on the fourth floor, and had mounted the interminable staircase to pay them a visit. Miss Stackpole contracted friendships, in travelling, with great freedom, and had formed several in railway-carriages, which were among her most valued ties. Ralph was making arrangements for the morrow's journey, and Isabel sat alone in a wilderness of yellow upholstery. The chairs and sofas were orange; the walls and windows were draped in purple and gilt. The mirrors, the pictures, had great flamboyant frames; the ceiling was deeply vaulted and painted over with naked muses and cherubs. To Osmond the place was painfully ugly; the false colours, the sham splendour, made him suffer. Isabel had taken in hand a volume of Ampère, presented, on their arrival in Rome, by Ralph; but though she held it in her lap with her finger vaguely kept in the place, she was not impatient to go on with her reading. A lamp covered with a drooping veil of pink tissue-paper burned on the table beside her, and diffused a strange pale rosiness over the scene.

"You say you will come back; but who knows?" Gilbert Osmond said. "I think you are much more likely to start on your voyage round the world. You are under no obligation to come back; you can do exactly what you choose; you can roam through space."

"Well, Italy is a part of space," Isabel answered; "I can take it on the way."

"On the way round the world? No, don't do that. Don't put us into a parenthesis—give us a chapter to ourselves. I don't want to see you on your travels. I would rather see you when they are over. I should like to see you when you are tired and satiated," Osmond added, in a moment. "I shall prefer you in that state."

Isabel, with her eyes bent down, fingered the pages of M. Ampère a little.

"You turn things into ridicule without seeming to do it, though not, I think, without intending it," she said at last. "You have no respect for my travels—you think them ridiculous."

"Where do you find that?"

Isabel went on in the same tone, fretting the edge of her book with the paper-knife.

"You see my ignorance, my blunders, the way I wander about as if the world belonged to me, simply because—because it has been put into my power to do so. You don't think a woman ought to do that. You think it bold and ungraceful."

"I think it beautiful," said Osmond. "You know my opinions—I have treated you to enough of them. Don't you remember my telling you that one ought to make one's life a work of art? You looked rather shocked at first; but then I told you that it was exactly what you seemed to me to be trying to do with your own life."

Isabel looked up from her book.

"What you despise most in the world is bad art."

"Possibly. But yours seem to me very good."

"If I were to go to Japan next winter, you would laugh at me," Isabel continued.

Osmond gave a smile—a keen one, but not a laugh, for the tone of their conversation was not jocular. Isabel was almost tremulously serious; he had seen her so before.

"You have an imagination that startles one!"

"That is exactly what I say. You think such an idea absurd."

"I would give my little finger to go to Japan; it is one of the countries I want most to see. Can't you believe that, with my taste for old lacquer?"

"I haven't a taste for old lacquer to excuse me," said Isabel.

"You have a better excuse—the means of going. You are quite wrong in your theory that I laugh at you. I don't know what put it into your head."

"It wouldn't be remarkable if you did think it ridiculous that I should have the means to travel, when you have not; for you know everything, and I know nothing."

"The more reason why you should travel and learn," said Osmond, smiling. "Besides," he added, more gravely, "I don't know everything."

Isabel was not struck with the oddity of his saying this gravely; she was thinking that the pleasantest incident of her life—so it pleased her to qualify her little visit to Rome—was coming to an end. That most of the interest of this episode had been owing to Mr. Osmond—this reflection she was not just now at pains to make; she had already done the point abundant justice. But she said to herself that if there were a danger that they should not meet again, perhaps after all it would be as well. Happy things do not repeat themselves, and these few days had been interfused with the element of success.

She might come back to Italy and find him different—this strange man who pleased her just as he was; and it would be better not to come than run the risk of that. But if she was not to come, the greater was the pity that this happy week was over; for a moment she felt her heart throb with a kind of delicious pain. The sensation kept her silent, and Gilbert Osmond was silent too; he was looking at her.

"Go everywhere," he said at last, in a low, kind voice; "do everything; get everything out of life. Be happy—be triumphant."

"What do you mean by being triumphant?"

"Doing what you like."

"To triumph, then, it seems to me, is to fail! Doing what we like is often very tiresome."

"Exactly," said Osmond, with his quick responsiveness. "As I intimated just now, you will be tired some day." He paused a moment, and then he went on: "I don't know

whether I had better not wait till then for something I wish to say to you."

"Ah, I can't advise you without knowing what it is. But I am horrid when I am tired," Isabel added, with due inconsequence.

"I don't believe that. You are angry, sometimes—that I can believe, though I have never seen it. But I am sure you are never disagreeable."

"Not even when I lose my temper?"

"You don't lose it—you find it, and that must be beautiful." Osmond spoke very simply—almost solemnly. "There must be something very noble about that."

"If I could only find it now!" the girl exclaimed, laughing, yet frowning.

"I am not afraid; I should fold my arms and admire you, I am speaking very seriously." He was leaning forward, with a hand on each knee; for some moments he bent his eyes on the floor. "What I wish to say to you," he went on at last, looking up, "is that I find I am in love with you."

Isabel instantly rose from her chair.

"Ah, keep that till I am tired!" she murmured.

"Tired of hearing it from others?" And Osmond sat there, looking up at her. "No, you may heed it now, or never, as you please. But, after all, I must say it now."

She had turned away, but in the movement she had stopped herself and dropped her gaze upon him. The two remained a moment in this situation, exchanging a long look—the large, conscious look of the critical hours of life. Then he got up and came near her, deeply respectful, as if he were afraid he had been too familiar.

"I am thoroughly in love with you."

He repeated the announcement in a tone of almost impersonal discretion; like a man who expected very little from it, but spoke for his own relief.

The tears came into Isabel's eyes—they were caused by an intenser throb of that pleasant pain I spoke of a moment ago. There was an immense sweetness in the words he had uttered; but, morally speaking, she retreated before them—facing him still—as she had retreated in two or three cases that we know of in which the same words had been spoken.

"Oh, don't say that, please," she answered at last, in a tone of entreaty which had nothing of conventional modesty, but which expressed the dread of having, in this case too, to choose and decide. What made her dread great was precisely the force which, as it would seem, ought to have banished all dread—the consciousness of what was in her own heart. It was terrible to have to surrender herself to that.

"I haven't the idea that it will matter much to you," said Osmond. "I have too little to offer you. What I have—it's enough for me; but it's not enough for you. I have neither fortune, nor fame, nor extrinsic advantages of any kind. So I offer nothing. I only tell you because I think it can't offend you, and some day or other it may give you pleasure. It gives me pleasure, I assure you," he went on, standing there before her, bending forward a little, turning his hat, which he had taken up, slowly round, with a movement which had all the decent tremor of awkwardness and none of its oddity, and presenting to her his keen, expressive, emphatic face. "It gives me no pain, because it is perfectly simple. For me you will always be the most important woman in the world."

Isabel looked at herself in this character—looked intently, and thought that she filled it with a certain grace. But what she said was not an expression of this complacency. "You don't offend me; but you ought to remember that, without being offended, one may be incommoded, troubled." "Incommoded": she heard herself saying that, and thought it a ridiculous word. But it was the word that came to her.

"I remember, perfectly. Of course you are surprised and startled. But if it is nothing but that, it will pass away. And it will perhaps leave something that I may not be ashamed of."

"I don't know what it may leave. You see at all events that I am not overwhelmed," said Isabel, with rather a pale smile. "I am not too troubled to think. And I think that I am glad we are separating—that I leave Rome to-morrow."

"Of course I don't agree with you there."

"I don't know you," said Isabel, abruptly; and then she coloured, as she heard herself saying what she had said almost a year before to Lord Warburton.

"If you were not going away you would know me better."

"I shall do that some other time."

"I hope so. I am very easy to know."

"No, no," said the girl, with a flash of bright eagerness; "there you are not sincere. You are not easy to know; no one could be less so."

"Well," Osmond answered, with a laugh, "I said that because I know myself. That may be a boast, but I do."

"Very likely; but you are very wise."

"So are you, Miss Archer!" Osmond exclaimed.

"I don't feel so just now. Still, I am wise enough to think you had better go. Good night."

"God bless you!" said Gilbert Osmond, taking the hand which she failed to surrender to him. And then in a moment he added, "If we meet again, you will find me as you leave me. If we don't, I shall be so, all the same."

"Thank you very much. Good-bye."

There was something quietly firm about Isabel's visitor; he might go of his own movement, but he would not be dismissed. "There is one thing more," he said. "I haven't asked anything of you—not even a thought in the future; you must do me that justice. But there is a little service I should like to ask. I shall not return home for several days; Rome is delightful, and it is a good place for a man in my state of mind. Oh, I know you are sorry to leave it; but you are right to do what your aunt wishes."

"She doesn't even wish it!" Isabel broke out, strangely.

Osmond for a moment was apparently on the point of saying something that would match these words. But he changed his mind, and rejoined, simply—"Ah well, it's proper you should go with her, all the same. Do everything that's proper; I go in for that. Excuse my being so patronising. You say you don't know me; but when you do you will discover what a worship I have for propriety."

"You are not conventional?" said Isabel, very gravely.

"I like the way you utter that word! No, I am not conventional: I am convention itself. You don't understand that?" And Osmond paused a moment, smiling. "I should like to explain it." Then, with a sudden, quick, bright nat-

uralness—"Do come back again!" he cried. "There are so many things we might talk about."

Isabel stood there with lowered eyes. "What service did you speak of just now?"

"Go and see my little daughter before you leave Florence. She is alone at the villa; I decided not to send her to my sister, who hasn't my ideas. Tell her she must love her poor father very much," said Gilbert Osmond, gently.

"It will be a great pleasure to me to go," Isabel answered. "I will tell her what you say. Once more good-bye."

On this he took a rapid, respectful leave. When he had gone, she stood a moment, looking about her, and then she seated herself, slowly, with an air of deliberation. She sat thus until her companions came back, with folded hands, gazing at the ugly carpet. Her agitation—for it had not diminished—was very still, very deep. That which had happened was something that for a week past her imagination had been going forward to meet; but here, when it came, she stopped—her imagination halted. The working of this young lady's spirit was strange, and I can only give it to you as I see it, not hoping to make it seem altogether natural. Her imagination stopped, as I say; there was a last vague space it could not cross—a dusky, uncertain tract which looked ambiguous, and even slightly treacherous, like a moorland seen in the winter twilight. But she was to cross it yet.

CHAPTER XXX

UNDER her cousin's escort Isabel returned on the morrow to Florence, and Ralph Touchett, though usually he was not fond of railway journeys, thought very well of the successive hours passed in the train which hurried his companion away from the city now distinguished by Gilbert Osmond's preference—hours that were to form the first stage in a still larger scheme of travel. Miss Stackpole had remained behind; she was planning a little trip to Naples, to be executed with Mr. Bantling's assistance. Isabel was to have but three days in Florence before the 4th of June, the date of Mrs. Touchett's departure, and she determined to devote the last of these to her promise to go and see Pansy Osmond. Her plan, however, seemed for a moment likely to modify itself, in deference to a plan of Madame Merle's. This lady was still at Casa Touchett; but she too was on the point of leaving Florence, her next station being an ancient castle in the mountains of Tuscany, the residence of a noble family of that country, whose acquaintance (she had known them, as she said, "for ever") seemed to Isabel, in the light of certain photographs of their immense crenellated dwelling which her friend was able to show her, a precious privilege.

She mentioned to Madame Merle that Mr. Osmond had asked her to call upon his daughter; she did not mention to her that he had also made her a declaration of love.

"Ah, comme cela se trouve!" the elder lady exclaimed. "I myself have been thinking it would be a kindness to take a look at the child before I go into the country."

"We can go together, then," said Isabel, reasonably. I say "reasonably," because the proposal was not uttered in the spirit of enthusiasm. She had prefigured her visit as made in solitude; she should like it better so. Nevertheless, to her great consideration for Madame Merle she was prepared to sacrifice this mystic sentiment.

Her friend meditated, with her usual suggestive smile. "After all," she presently said, "why should we both go; having, each of us, so much to do during these last hours?"

"Very good; I can easily go alone."

"I don't know about your going alone—to the house of a handsome bachelor. He has been married—but so long ago!"

Isabel stared. "When Mr. Osmond is away, what does it matter?"

"They don't know he is away, you see."

"They? Whom do you mean?"

"Every one. But perhaps it doesn't matter."

"If you were going, why shouldn't I?" Isabel asked.

"Because I am an old frump, and you are a beautiful young woman."

"Granting all that, you have not promised."

"How much you think of your promises!" said Madame Merle, with a smile of genial mockery.

"I think a great deal of my promises. Does that surprise you?"

"You are right," Madame Merle reflected audibly. "I really think you wish to be kind to the child."

"I wish very much to be kind to her."

"Go and see her, then; no one will be the wiser. And tell her I would have come if you had not.—Or rather," Madame Merle added—"don't tell her; she won't care."

As Isabel drove, in the publicity of an open vehicle, along the charming winding way which led to Mr. Osmond's hill-top, she wondered what Madame Merle had meant by no one being the wiser. Once in a while, at large intervals, this lady, in whose discretion, as a general thing, there was something almost brilliant, dropped a remark of ambiguous quality, struck a note that sounded false. What cared Isabel Archer for the vulgar judgments of obscure people? and did Madame Merle suppose that she was capable of doing a deed in secret? Of course not—she must have meant something else—something which in the press of the hours that preceded her departure she had not had time to explain. Isabel would return to this some day; there were certain things as to which she liked to be clear. She heard Pansy

strumming at the piano in another apartment, as she herself was ushered into Mr. Osmond's drawing-room; the little girl was "practising," and Isabel was pleased to think that she performed this duty faithfully. Presently Pansy came in, smoothing down her frock, and did the honours of her father's house with the wide-eyed conscientiousness of a sensitive child. Isabel sat there for half-an-hour, and Pansy entertained her like a little lady—not chattering, but conversing, and showing the same courteous interest in Isabel's affairs that Isabel was so good as to take in hers. Isabel wondered at her; as I have said before, she had never seen a child like that. How well she had been taught, said our keen young lady, how prettily she had been directed and fashioned; and yet how simple, how natural, how innocent she has been kept! Isabel was fond of psychological problems, and it had pleased her, up to this time, to be in doubt as to whether Miss Pansy were not all-knowing. Was her infantine serenity but the perfection of self-consciousness? Was it put on to please her father's visitor, or was it the direct expression of a little neat, orderly character? The hour that Isabel spent in Mr. Osmond's beautiful empty, dusky rooms—the windows had been half-darkened, to keep out the heat, and here and there, through an easy crevice, the splendid summer day peeped in, lighting a gleam of faded colour or tarnished gilt in the rich-looking gloom—Isabel's interview with the daughter of the house, I say, effectually settled this question. Pansy was really a blank page, a pure white surface; she was not clever enough for precocious coquetries. She was not clever; Isabel could see that; she only had nice feelings. There was something touching about her; Isabel had felt it before; she would be an easy victim of fate. She would have no will, no power to resist, no sense of her own importance; only an exquisite taste, and an appreciation, equally exquisite, of such affection as might be bestowed upon her. She would easily be mystified, easily crushed; her force would be solely in her power to cling. She moved about the place with Isabel, who had asked leave to walk through the other rooms again, where Pansy gave her judgment on several works of art. She talked about her prospects, her occupations, her father's intention; she was

not egotistical, but she felt the propriety of giving Isabel the information that so observant a visitor would naturally expect.

"Please tell me," she said, "did papa, in Rome, go to see Madame Catherine? He told me he would if he had time. Perhaps he had not time. Papa likes a great deal of time. He wished to speak about my education; it isn't finished yet, you know. I don't know what they can do with me more; but it appears it is far from finished. Papa told me one day he thought he would finish it himself; for the last year or two, at the convent, the masters that teach the tall girls are so very dear. Papa is not rich, and I should be very sorry if he were to pay much money for me, because I don't think I am worth it. I don't learn quickly enough, and I have got no memory. For what I am told, yes—especially when it is pleasant; but not for what I learn in a book. There was a young girl, who was my best friend, and they took her away from the convent when she was fourteen, to make—how do you say it in English?—to make a *dot*. You don't say it in English? I hope it isn't wrong; I only mean they wished to keep the money, to marry her. I don't know whether it is for that that papa wishes to keep the money, to marry me. It costs so much to marry!" Pansy went on, with a sigh; "I think papa might make that economy. At any rate I am too young to think about it yet, and I don't care for any gentleman; I mean for any but him. If he were not my papa I should like to marry him; I would rather be his daughter than the wife of—of some strange person. I miss him very much, but not so much as you might think, for I have been so much away from him. Papa has always been principally for holidays. I miss Madame Catherine almost more; but you must not tell him that. You shall not see him again? I am very sorry for that. Of every one who comes here I like you the best. That is not a great compliment, for there are not many people. It was very kind of you to come to-day—so far from your house; for I am as yet only a child. Oh, yes, I have only the occupations of a child. When did you give them up, the occupations of a child? I should like to know how old you are, but I don't know whether it is right to ask. At the convent they told us that we must never ask

the age. I don't like to do anything that is not expected; it looks at if one had not been properly taught. I myself—I should never like to be taken by surprise. Papa left directions for everything. I go to bed very early. When the sun goes off that side I go into the garden. Papa left strict orders that I was not to get scorched. I always enjoy the view; the mountains are so graceful. In Rome, from the convent, we saw nothing but roofs and bell-towers. I practise three hours. I do not play very well. You play yourself? I wish very much that you would play something for me; papa wishes very much that I should hear good music. Madame Merle has played for me several times; that is what I like best about Madame Merle; she has great facility. I shall never have facility. And I have no voice—just a little thread."

Isabel gratified this respectful wish, drew off her gloves, and sat down to the piano, while Pansy, standing beside her, watched her white hands move quickly over the keys. When she stopped, she kissed the child good-bye, and held her a moment, looking at her.

"Be a good child," she said; "give pleasure to your father."

"I think that is what I live for," Pansy answered. "He has not much pleasure; he is rather a sad man."

Isabel listened to this assertion with an interest which she felt it to be almost a torment that she was obliged to conceal from the child. It was her pride that obliged her, and a certain sense of decency; there were still other things in her head which she felt a strong impulse, instantly checked, to say to Pansy about her father; there were things it would have given her pleasure to hear the child, to make the child, say. But she no sooner became conscious of these things than her imagination was hushed with horror at the idea of taking advantage of the little girl—it was of this she would have accused herself—and of leaving an audible trace of her emotion behind. She had come—she had come; but she had stayed only an hour! She rose quickly from the music-stool; even then, however, she lingered a moment, still holding her small companion, drawing the child's little tender person closer, and looking down at her. She was obliged to confess it to herself—she would have taken a passionate pleasure

in talking about Gilbert Osmond to this innocent, diminutive creature who was near to him. But she said not another word; she only kissed Pansy once more. They went together through the vestibule, to the door which opened into the court; and there Pansy stopped, looking rather wistfully beyond.

"I may go no further," she said. "I have promised papa not to go out of this door."

"You are right to obey him; he will never ask you anything unreasonable."

"I shall always obey him. But when will you come again?"

"Not for a long time, I am afraid."

"As soon as you can, I hope. I am only a little girl," said Pansy, "but I shall always expect you."

And the small figure stood in the high, dark doorway, watching Isabel cross the clear, grey court, and disappear into the brightness beyond the big *portone,* which gave a wider gleam as it opened.

CHAPTER XXXI

ISABEL came back to Florence, but only after several months; an interval sufficiently replete with incident. It is not, however, during this interval that we are closely concerned with her; our attention is engaged again on a certain day in the late springtime, shortly after her return to the Palazzo Crescentini, and a year from the date of the incidents I have just narrated. She was alone on this occasion, in one of the smaller of the numerous rooms devoted by Mrs. Touchett to social uses, and there was that in her expression and attitude which would have suggested that she was expecting a visitor. The tall window was open, and though its green shutters were partly drawn, the bright air of the garden had come in through a broad interstice and filled the room with warmth and perfume. Our young lady stood for some time at the window, with her hands clasped behind her, gazing into the brilliant aperture in the manner of a person relapsing into reverie. She was preoccupied; she was too restless to sit down, to work, to read. It was evidently not her design, however, to catch a glimpse of her visitor before he should pass into the house; for the entrance to the palace was not through the garden, in which stillness and privacy always reigned. She was endeavouring rather to anticipate his arrival by a process of conjecture, and to judge by the expression of her face this attempt gave her plenty to do. She was extremely grave; not sad exactly, but deeply serious. The lapse of a year may doubtless account for a considerable increase of gravity; though this will depend a good deal upon the manner in which the year has been spent. Isabel had spent hers in seeing the world; she had moved about; she had travelled; she had exerted herself with an almost passionate activity. She was now, to her own sense, a very different person from the frivolous young woman from Albany who had begun to see Europe upon the lawn at Gardencourt a couple of years before. She flattered

herself that she had gathered a rich experience, that she knew a great deal more of life than this light-minded creature had even suspected. If her thoughts just now had inclined themselves to retrospect, instead of fluttering their wings nervously about the present, they would have evoked a multitude of interesting pictures. These pictures would have been both landscapes and figure-pieces; the latter, however, would have been the more numerous. With several of the figures concerned in these combinations we are already acquainted. There would be, for instance, the conciliatory Lily, our heroine's sister and Edmund Ludlow's wife, who came out from New York to spend five months with Isabel. She left her husband behind her, but she brought her children, to whom Isabel now played with equal munificence and tenderness the part of maiden-aunt. Mr. Ludlow, towards the last, had been able to snatch a few weeks from his forensic triumphs, and, crossing the ocean with extreme rapidity, spent a month with the two ladies in Paris, before taking his wife home. The little Ludlows had not yet, even from the American point of view, reached the proper touristage; so that while her sister was with her, Isabel confined her movements to a narrow circle. Lily and the babies had joined her in Switzerland in the month of July, and they had spent a summer of fine weather in an Alpine valley where the flowers were thick in the meadows, and the shade of great chestnuts made a resting-place in such upward wanderings as might be undertaken by ladies and children on warm afternoons. Afterwards they had come to Paris, a city beloved by Lily, but less appreciated by Isabel, who in those days was constantly thinking of Rome. Mrs. Ludlow enjoyed Paris, but she was nevertheless somewhat disappointed and puzzled; and after her husband had joined her she was in addition a good deal depressed at not being able to induce him to enter into these somewhat subtle and complex emotions. They all had Isabel for their object; but Edmund Ludlow, as he had always done before, declined to be surprised, or distressed, or mystified, or elated, at anything his sister-in-law might have done or have failed to do. Mrs. Ludlow's feelings were various. At one moment she thought it would be so natural for Isabel to come home and take a

house in New York—the Rossiters', for instance, which had an elegant conservatory, and was just around the corner from her own; at another she could not conceal her surprise at the girl's not marrying some gentleman of rank in one of the foreign countries. On the whole, as I have said, she was rather disappointed. She had taken more satisfaction in Isabel's accession of fortune than if the money had been left to herself! it had seemed to her to offer just the proper setting for her sister's slender but eminent figure. Isabel had developed less, however, than Lily had thought likely—development, to Lily's understanding, being somehow mysteriously connected with morning-calls and evening-parties. Intellectually, doubtless, she had made immense strides; but she appeared to have achieved few of those social conquests of which Mrs. Ludlow had expected to admire the trophies. Lily's conception of such achievements was extremely vague; but this was exactly what she had expected of Isabel—to give it form and body. Isabel could have done as well as she had done in New York; and Mrs. Ludlow appealed to her husband to know whether there was any privilege that she enjoyed in Europe which the society of that city might not offer her. We know, ourselves, that Isabel had made conquests—whether inferior or not to those she might have effected in her native land, it would be a delicate matter to decide, and it is not altogether with a feeling of complacency that I again mention that she had not made these honourable victories public. She had not told her sister the history of Lord Warburton, nor had she given her a hint of Mr. Osmond's state of mind; and she had no better reason for her silence than that she didn't wish to speak. It entertained her more to say nothing, and she had no idea of asking poor Lily's advice. But Lily knew nothing of these rich mysteries, and it is no wonder, therefore, that she pronounced her sister's career in Europe rather dull—an impression confirmed by the fact that Isabel's silence about Mr. Osmond, for instance was in direct proportion to the frequency with which he occupied her thoughts. As this happened very often, it sometimes appeared to Mrs. Ludlow that her sister was really losing her gaiety. So very strange a result of so exhilarating an inci-

dent as inheriting a fortune was of course perplexing to the cheerful Lily; it added to her general sense that Isabel was not at all like other people.

Isabel's gaiety, however—superficially speaking, at least—exhibited itself rather more after her sister had gone home. She could imagine something more poetic than spending the winter in Paris—Paris was like smart, neat prose—and her frequent correspondence with Madame Merle did much to stimulate such fancies. She had never had a keener sense of freedom, of the absolute boldness and wantonness of liberty, than when she turned away from the platform at the Euston station, on one of the latter days of November, after the departure of the train which was to convey poor Lily, her husband, and her children, to their ship at Liverpool. It had been good for her to have them with her; she was very conscious of that; she was very observant, as we know, of what was good for her, and her effort was constantly to find something that was good enough. To profit by the present advantage till the latest moment, she had made the journey from Paris with the unenvied travellers. She would have accompanied them to Liverpool as well, only Edmund Ludlow had asked her, as a favour, not to do so; it made Lily so fidgety, and she asked such impossible questions. Isabel watched the train move away; she kissed her hand to the elder of her small nephews, a demonstrative child who leaned dangerously far out of the window of the carriage and made separation an occasion of violent hilarity, and then she walked back into the foggy London street. The world lay before her—she could do whatever she chose. There was something exciting in the feeling, but for the present her choice was tolerably discreet; she chose simply to walk back from Euston Square to her hotel. The early dusk of a November afternoon had already closed in; the street-lamps, in the thick, brown air, looked weak and red; our young lady was unattended, and Euston Square was a long way from Piccadilly. But Isabel performed the journey with a positive enjoyment of its dangers, and lost her way almost on purpose, in order to get more sensations, so that she was disappointed when an obliging policeman easily set her right again. She was so fond of the spectacle of human life that

she enjoyed even the aspect of gathering dusk in the London streets—the moving crowds, the hurrying cabs, the lighted shops, the flaring stalls, the dark, shining dampness of everything. That evening, at her hotel, she wrote to Madame Merle that she should start in a day or two for Rome. She made her way down to Rome without touching at Florence—having gone first to Venice and then proceeded southward by Ancona. She accomplished this journey without other assistance than that of her servant, for her natural protectors were not now on the ground. Ralph Touchett was spending the winter at Corfu, and Miss Stackpole, in the September previous, had been recalled to America by a telegram from the *Interviewer*. This journal offered its brilliant correspondent a fresher field for her talents than the mouldering cities of Europe, and Henrietta was cheered on her way by a promise from Mr. Bantling that he would soon come over and see her. Isabel wrote to Mrs. Touchett to apologise for not coming just then to Florence, and her aunt replied characteristically enough. Apologies, Mrs. Touchett intimated, were of no more use than soap-bubbles, and she herself never dealt in such articles. One either did the thing or one didn't, and what one would have done belonged to the sphere of the irrelevant, like the idea of a future life or the origin of things. Her letter was frank, but (a rare case with Mrs. Touchett) it was not so frank as it seemed. She easily forgave her niece for not stopping at Florence, because she thought it was a sign that there was nothing going on with Gilbert Osmond. She watched, of course, to see whether Mr. Osmond would now go to Rome, and took some comfort in learning that he was not guilty of an absence. Isabel, on her side, had not been a fortnight in Rome before she proposed to Madame Merle that they should make a little pilgrimage to the East. Madame Merle remarked that her friend was restless, but she added that she herself had always been consumed with a desire to visit Athens and Constantinople. The two ladies accordingly embarked on this expedition, and spent three months in Greece, in Turkey, in Egypt. Isabel found much to interest her in these countries, though Madame Merle continued to remark that even among the most classic sites, the scenes most calculated to

suggest repose and reflection, her restlessness prevailed. Isabel travelled rapidly, eagerly, audaciously; she was like a thirsty person draining cup after cup. Madame Merle, for the present, was a most efficient duenna. It was on Isabel's invitation she had come, and she imparted all necessary dignity to the girl's uncountenanced condition. She played her part with the sagacity that might have been expected of her; she effaced herself, she accepted the position of a companion whose expenses were profusely paid. The situation, however, had no hardships, and people who met this graceful pair on their travels would not have been able to tell you which was the patroness and which the client. To say that Madame Merle improved on acquaintance would misrepresent the impression she made upon Isabel, who had thought her from the first a perfectly enlightened woman. At the end of an intimacy of three months Isabel felt that she knew her better; her character had revealed itself, and Madame Merle had also at last redeemed her promise of relating her history from her own point of view—a consummation the more desirable as Isabel had already heard it related from the point of view of others. This history was so sad a one (in so far as it concerned the late M. Merle, an adventurer of the lowest class, who had taken advantage, years before, of her youth, and of an inexperience in which those who knew her only now would find it difficult to believe); it abounded so in startling and lamentable incidents, that Isabel wondered the poor lady had kept so much of her freshness, her interest in life. Into this freshness of Madame Merle she obtained a considerable insight; she saw that it was, after all, a tolerably artificial bloom. Isabel liked her as much as ever, but there was a certain corner of the curtain that never was lifted; it was as if Madame Merle had remained after all a foreigner.

She had once said that she came from a distance, that she belonged to the old world, and Isabel never lost the impression that she was the product of a different clime from her own; that she had grown up under other stars. Isabel believed that at bottom she had a different morality. Of course the morality of civilised persons has always much in common; but Isabel suspected that her friend had esoteric views. She believed,

with the presumption of youth, that a morality which differed from her own must be inferior to it; and this conviction was an aid to detecting an occasional flash of cruelty, an occasional lapse from candour, in the conversation of a woman who had raised delicate kindness to an art, and whose nature was too large for the narrow ways of deception. Her conception of human motives was different from Isabel's, and there were several in her list of which our heroine had not even heard. She had not heard of everything, that was very plain; and there were evidently things in the world of which it was not advantageous to hear. Once or twice Isabel had a sort of fright, but the reader will be amused at the cause of it. Madame Merle, as we know, comprehended, responded sympathised, with wonderful readiness; yet it had nevertheless happened that her young friend mentally exclaimed—"Heaven forgive her, she doesn't understand me!" Absurd as it may seem, this discovery operated as a shock; it left Isabel with a vague horror, in which there was even an element of foreboding. The horror of course subsided, in the light of some sudden proof of Madame Merle's remarkable intelligence; but it left a sort of high-water-mark in the development of this delightful intimacy. Madame Merle had once said that, in her belief, when a friendship ceased to grow, it immediately began to decline—there was no point of equilibrium between liking a person more and liking him less. A stationary affection, in other words, was impossible—it must move one way or the other. Without estimating the value of this doctrine, I may say that if Isabel's imagination, which had hitherto been so actively engaged on her friend's behalf, began at last to languish, she enjoyed her society not a particle less than before. If their friendship had declined, it had declined to a very comfortable level. The truth is that in these days the girl had other uses for her imagination, which was better occupied than it had ever been. I do not allude to the impulse it received as she gazed at the Pyramids in the course of an excursion from Cairo, or as she stood among the broken columns of the Acropolis and fixed her eyes upon the point designated to her as the Strait of Salamis; deep and memorable as these emotions had been. She came back by the last of March from Egypt and Greece, and made another

stay in Rome. A few days after her arrival Gilbert Osmond came down from Florence and remained three weeks, during which the fact of her being with his old friend, Madame Merle, in whose house she had gone to lodge, made it virtually inevitable that he should see her every day. When the last of April came she wrote to Mrs. Touchett that she should now be very happy to accept an invitation given long before, and went to pay a visit to the Palazzo Crescentini, Madame Merle on this occasion remaining in Rome. Isabel found her aunt alone; her cousin was still at Corfu. Ralph, however, was expected in Florence from day to day, and Isabel, who had not seen him for upwards of a year, was prepared to give him the most affectionate welcome.

CHAPTER XXXII

IT was not of him, nevertheless, that she was thinking while she stood at the window, where we found her a while ago, and it was not of any of the matters that I have just rapidly sketched. She was not thinking of the past, but of the future; of the immediate, impending hour. She had reason to expect a scene, and she was not fond of scenes. She was not asking herself what she should say to her visitor; this question had already been answered. What he would say to her—that was the interesting speculation. It could be nothing agreeable; Isabel was convinced of this, and the conviction had something to do with her being rather paler than usual. For the rest, however, she wore her natural brightness of aspect; even deep grief, with this vivid young lady, would have had a certain soft effulgence. She had laid aside her mourning, but she was still very simply dressed, and as she felt a good deal older than she had done a year before, it is probable that to a certain extent she looked so. She was not left indefinitely to her apprehensions, for the servant at last came in and presented her a card.

"Let the gentleman come in," said Isabel, who continued to gaze out of the window after the footman had retired. It was only when she had heard the door close behind the person who presently entered that she looked round.

Caspar Goodwood stood there—stood and received a moment, from head to foot, the bright, dry gaze with which she rather withheld than offered a greeting. Whether on his side Mr. Goodwood felt himself older than on the first occasion of our meeting him, is a point which we shall perhaps presently ascertain; let me say meanwhile that to Isabel's critical glance he showed nothing of the injury of time. Straight, strong, and fresh, there was nothing in his appearance that spoke positively either of youth or of age; he looked too deliberate, too serious to be young, and too eager, too active to be old. Old he would never be, and this would

serve as a compensation for his never having known the age of chubbiness. Isabel perceived that his jaw had quite the same voluntary look that it had worn in earlier days; but she was prepared to admit that such a moment as the present was not a time for relaxation. He had the air of a man who had travelled hard; he said nothing at first, as if he had been out of breath. This gave Isabel time to make a reflection. "Poor fellow," she mentally murmured, "what great things he is capable of, and what a pity that he should waste his splendid force! What a pity, too, that one can't satisfy everybody!" It gave her time to do more—to say at the end of a minute,

"I can't tell you how I hoped that you wouldn't come."

"I have no doubt of that." And Caspar Goodwood looked about him for a seat. Not only had he come, but he meant to stay a little.

"You must be very tired," said Isabel, seating herself, generously, as she thought, to give him his opportunity.

"No, I am not at all tired. Did you ever knew me to be tired?"

"Never; I wish I had. When did you arrive here?"

"Last night, very late; in a kind of a snail-train they call the express. These Italian trains go at about the rate of an American funeral."

"That is in keeping—you must have felt as if you were coming to a funeral," Isabel said, forcing a smile, in order to offer such encouragement as she might to an easy treatment of their situation. She had reasoned out the matter elaborately; she had made it perfectly clear that she broke no faith, that she falsified no contract; but for all this she was afraid of him. She was ashamed of her fear; but she was devoutly thankful there was nothing else to be ashamed of.

He looked at her with his stiff persistency—a persistency in which there was almost a want of tact; especially as there was a dull dark beam in his eye which rested on her almost like a physical weight.

"No, I didn't feel that; because I couldn't think of you as dead. I wish I could!" said Caspar Goodwood, plainly.

"I thank you immensely."

"I would rather think of you as dead than as married to another man."

"That is very selfish of you!" Isabel cried, with the ardour of a real conviction. "If you are not happy yourself, others have a right to be."

"Very likely it is selfish; but I don't in the least mind your saying so. I don't mind anything you can say now—I don't feel it. The cruellest things you could think of would be mere pin-pricks. After what you have done I shall never feel anything. I mean anything but that. That I shall feel all my life."

Mr. Goodwood made these detached assertions with a sort of dry deliberateness, in his hard, slow American tone, which flung no atmospheric colour over propositions intrinsically crude. The tone made Isabel angry rather than touched her; but her anger perhaps was fortunate, inasmuch as it gave her a further reason for controlling herself. It was under the pressure of this control that she said, after a little, irrelevantly, by way of answer to Mr. Goodwood's speech—"When did you leave New York?"

He threw up his head a moment, as if he were calculating. "Seventeen days ago."

"You must have travelled fast in spite of your slow trains."

"I came as fast as I could. I would have come five days ago if I had been able."

"It wouldn't have made any difference, Mr. Goodwood," said Isabel, smiling.

"Not to you—no. But to me."

"You gain nothing that I see."

"That is for me to judge!"

"Of course. To me it seems that you only torment yourself." And then, to change the subject, Isabel asked him if he had seen Henrietta Stackpole.

He looked as if he had not come from Boston to Florence to talk about Henrietta Stackpole; but he answered distinctly enough, that this young lady had come to see him just before he left America.

"She came to see you?"

"Yes, she was in Boston, and she called at my office. It was the day I got your letter."

"Did you tell her?" Isabel asked, with a certain anxiety.

"Oh no," said Caspar Goodwood, simply; "I didn't want to. She will hear it soon enough; she hears everything."

"I shall write to her; and then she will write to me and scold me," Isabel declared, trying to smile again.

Caspar, however, remained sternly grave. "I guess she'll come out," he said.

"On purpose to scold me?"

"I don't know. She seemed to think she had not seen Europe thoroughly."

"I am glad you tell me that," Isabel said. "I must prepare for her."

Mr. Goodwood fixed his eyes for a moment on the floor; then at last, raising them—"Does she know Mr. Osmond?" he asked.

"A little. And she doesn't like him. But of course I don't marry to please Henrietta," Isabel added.

It would have been better for poor Caspar if she had tried a little more to gratify Miss Stackpole; but he did not say so; he only asked, presently, when her marriage would take place.

"I don't know yet. I can only say it will be soon. I have told no one but yourself and one other person—an old friend of Mr. Osmond's."

"Is it a marriage your friends won't like?" Caspar Goodwood asked.

"I really haven't an idea. As I say, I don't marry for my friends."

He went on, making no exclamation, no comment, only asking questions.

"What is Mr. Osmond?"

"What is he? Nothing at all but a very good man. He is not in business," said Isabel. "He is not rich; he is not known for anything in particular."

She disliked Mr. Goodwood's questions, but she said to herself that she owed it to him to satisfy him as far as possible.

The satisfaction poor Caspar exhibited was certainly small; he sat very upright, gazing at her.

"Where does he come from?" he went on.

"From nowhere. He has spent most of his life in Italy."

"You said in your letter that he was an American. Hasn't he a native place?"

"Yes, but he has forgotten it. He left it as a small boy."

"Has he never gone back?"

"Why should he go back?" Isabel asked, flushing a little, and defensively. "He has no profession."

"He might have gone back for his pleasure. Doesn't he like the United States?"

"He doesn't know them. Then he is very simple—he contents himself with Italy."

"With Italy and with you," said Mr. Goodwood, with gloomy plainness, and no appearance of trying to make an epigram. "What has he ever done?" he added, abruptly.

"That I should marry him? Nothing at all," Isabel replied, with a smile that had gradually become a trifle defiant. "If he had done great things would you forgive me any better? Give me up, Mr. Goodwood; I am marrying a nonentity. Don't try to take an interest in him; you can't."

"I can't appreciate him; that's what you mean. And you don't mean in the least that he is a nonentity. You think he is a great man, though no one else thinks so."

Isabel's colour deepened; she thought this very clever of her companion, and it was certainly a proof of the clairvoyance of such a feeling as his.

"Why do you always come back to what others think? I can't discuss Mr. Osmond with you."

"Of course not," said Caspar, reasonably.

And he sat there with his air of stiff helplessness, as if not only this were true, but there were nothing else that they might discuss.

"You see how little you gain," Isabel broke out—"how little comfort or satisfaction I can give you."

"I didn't expect you to give me much."

"I don't understand, then, why you came."

"I came because I wanted to see you once more—as you are."

"I appreciate that; but if you had waited a while, sooner or later we should have been sure to meet, and our meeting would have been pleasanter for each of us than this."

"Waited till after you are married? That is just what I didn't want to do. You will be different then."

"Not very. I shall still be a great friend of yours. You will see."

"That will make it all the worse," said Mr. Goodwood, grimly.

"Ah, you are unaccommodating! I can't promise to dislike you, in order to help you to resign yourself."

"I shouldn't care if you did!"

Isabel got up, with a movement of repressed impatience, and walked to the window, where she remained a moment, looking out. When she turned round, her visitor was still motionless in his place. She came towards him again and stopped, resting her hand on the back of the chair she had just quitted.

"Do you mean you came simply to look at me? That's better for you, perhaps, than for me."

"I wished to hear the sound of your voice," said Caspar.

"You have heard it, and you see it says nothing very sweet."

"It gives me pleasure, all the same."

And with this he got up.

She had felt pain and displeasure when she received that morning the note in which he told her that he was in Florence, and, with her permission, would come within an hour to see her. She had been vexed and distressed, though she had sent back word by his messenger that he might come when he would. She had not been better pleased when she saw him; his being there at all was so full of implication. It implied things she could never assent to—rights, reproaches, remonstrance, rebuke, the expectation of making her change her purpose. These things, however, if implied, had not been expressed; and now our young lady, strangely enough, began to resent her visitor's remarkable self-control.

There was a dumb misery about him which irritated her; there was a manly staying of his hand which made her heart beat faster. She felt her agitation rising, and she said to herself that she was as angry as a woman who had been in the wrong. She was not in the wrong; she had fortunately

not that bitterness to swallow; but, all the same, she wished he would denounce her a little. She had wished his visit would be short; it had no purpose, no propriety; yet now that he seemed to be turning away, she felt a sudden horror of his leaving her without uttering a word that would give her an opportunity to defend herself more than she had done in writing to him a month before, in a few carefully chosen words, to announce her engagement. If she were not in the wrong, however, why should she desire to defend herself? It was an excess of generosity on Isabel's part to desire that Mr. Goodwood should be angry.

If he had not held himself hard it might have made him so to hear the tone in which she suddenly exclaimed, as if she were accusing him of having accused her,

"I have not deceived you! I was perfectly free!"

"Yes, I know that," said Caspar.

"I gave you full warning that I would do as I chose."

"You said you would probably never marry, and you said it so positively that I pretty well believed it."

Isabel was silent an instant.

"No one can be more surprised than myself at my present intention."

"You told me that if I heard you were engaged, I was not to believe it," Caspar went on. "I heard it twenty days ago from yourself, but I remembered what you had said. I thought there might be some mistake, and that is partly why I came."

"If you wish me to repeat it by word of mouth, that is soon done. There is no mistake at all."

"I saw that as soon as I came into the room."

"What good would it do you that I shouldn't marry?" Isabel asked, with a certain fierceness.

"I should like it better than this."

"You are very selfish, as I said before."

"I know that. I am selfish as iron."

"Even iron sometimes melts. If you will be reasonable I will see you again."

"Don't you call me reasonable now?"

"I don't know what to say to you," she answered, with sudden humility.

"I sha'n't trouble you for a long time," the young man went on. He made a step towards the door, but he stopped. "Another reason why I came was that I wanted to hear what you would say in explanation of your having changed your mind."

Isabel's humbleness as suddenly deserted her.

"In explanation? Do you think I am bound to explain?"

Caspar gave her one of his long dumb looks.

"You were very positive. I did believe it."

"So did I. Do you think I could explain if I would?"

"No, I suppose not. Well," he added, "I have done what I wished. I have seen you."

"How little you make of these terrible journeys," Isabel murmured.

"If you are afraid I am tired, you may be at your ease about that." He turned away, this time in earnest, and no handshake, no sign of parting, was exchanged between them. At the door he stopped, with his hand on the knob. "I shall leave Florence to-morrow," he said.

"I am delighted to hear it!" she answered, passionately. And he went out. Five minutes after he had gone she burst into tears.

CHAPTER XXXIII

HER fit of weeping, however, was of brief duration, and the signs of it had vanished when, an hour later, she broke the news to her aunt. I use this expression because she had been sure Mrs. Touchett would not be pleased; Isabel had only waited to tell her till she had seen Mr. Goodwood. She had an odd impression that it would not be honourable to make the fact public before she should have heard what Mr. Goodwood would say about it. He had said rather less than she expected, and she now had a somewhat angry sense of having lost time. But she would lose no more; she waited till Mrs. Touchett came into the drawing-room before the mid-day breakfast, and then she said to her—

"Aunt Lydia, I have something to tell you."

Mrs. Touchett gave a little jump and looked at the girl almost fiercely.

"You needn't tell me; I know what it is."

"I don't know how you know."

"The same way that I know when the window is open—by feeling a draught. You are going to marry that man."

"What man do you mean?" Isabel inquired, with great dignity.

"Madame Merle's friend—Mr. Osmond."

"I don't know why you call him Madame Merle's friend. Is that the principal thing he is known by?"

"If he is not her friend he ought to be—after what she has done for him!" cried Mrs. Touchett. "I shouldn't have expected it of her; I am disappointed."

"If you mean that Madame Merle has had anything to do with my engagement you are greatly mistaken," Isabel declared, with a sort of ardent coldness.

"You mean that your attractions were sufficient, without the gentleman being urged? You are quite right. They are immense, your attractions, and he would never have

presumed to think of you if she had not put him up to it. He has a very good opinion of himself, but he was not a man to take trouble. Madame Merle took the trouble for him."

"He has taken a great deal for himself!" cried Isabel, with a voluntary laugh.

Mrs. Touchett gave a sharp nod.

"I think he must, after all, to have made you like him."

"I thought you liked him yourself."

"I did, and that is why I am angry with him."

"Be angry with me, not with him," said the girl.

"Oh, I am always angry with you; that's no satisfaction! Was it for this that you refused Lord Warburton?"

"Please don't go back to that. Why shouldn't I like Mr. Osmond, since you did?"

"I never wanted to marry him; there is nothing of him."

"Then he can't hurt me," said Isabel.

"Do you think you are going to be happy? No one is happy."

"I shall set the fashion then. What does one marry for?"

"What you will marry for, heaven only knows. People usually marry as they go into partnership—to set up a house. But in your partnership you will bring everything."

"Is it that Mr. Osmond is not rich? Is that what you are talking about?" Isabel asked.

"He has no money; he has no name; he has no importance. I value such things and I have the courage to say it; I think they are very precious. Many other people think the same, and they show it. But they give some other reason!"

Isabel hesitated a little.

"I think I value everything that is valuable. I care very much for money, and that is why I wish Mr. Osmond to have some."

"Give it to him, then; but marry some one else."

"His name is good enough for me," the girl went on. "It's a very pretty name. Have I such a fine one myself?"

"All the more reason you should improve on it. There are only a dozen American names. Do you marry him out of charity?"

"It was my duty to tell you, Aunt Lydia, but I don't think it is my duty to explain to you. Even if it were, I shouldn't be able. So please don't remonstrate; in talking about it you have me at a disadvantage. I can't talk about it."

"I don't remonstrate, I simply answer you; I must give some sign of intelligence. I saw it coming, and I said nothing. I never meddle."

"You never do, and I am greatly obliged to you. You have been very considerate."

"It was not considerate—it was convenient," said Mrs. Touchett. "But I shall talk to Madame Merle."

"I don't see why you keep bringing her in. She has been a very good friend to me."

"Possibly; but she has been a poor one to me."

"What has she done to you?"

"She has deceived me. She had as good as promised me to prevent your engagement."

"She couldn't have prevented it."

"She can do anything; that is what I have always liked her for. I knew she could play any part; but I understood that she played them one by one. I didn't understand that she would play two at the same time."

"I don't know what part she may have played to you," Isabel said; "that is between yourselves. To me she has been honest, and kind, and devoted."

"Devoted, of course; she wished you to marry her candidate. She told me that she was watching you only in order to interpose."

"She said that to please you," the girl answered; conscious, however, of the inadequacy of the explanation.

"To please me by deceiving me? She knows me better. Am I pleased to-day?"

"I don't think you are ever much pleased," Isabel was obliged to reply. "If Madame Merle knew you would learn the truth, what had she to gain by insincerity?"

"She gained time, as you see. While I waited for her to interfere you were marching away, and she was really beating the drum."

"That is very well. But by your own admission you saw

I was marching, and even if she had given the alarm you would not have tried to stop me."

"No, but some one else would."

"Whom do you mean?" Isabel asked, looking very hard at her aunt.

Mrs. Touchett's little bright eyes, active as they usually were, sustained her gaze rather than returned it.

"Would you have listened to Ralph?"

"Not if he had abused Mr. Osmond."

"Ralph doesn't abuse people; you know that perfectly. He cares very much for you."

"I know he does," said Isabel; "and I shall feel the value of it now, for he knows that whatever I do I do with reason."

"He never believed you would do this. I told him you were capable of it, and he argued the other way."

"He did it for the sake of argument," said Isabel, smiling. "You don't accuse him of having deceived you; why should you accuse Madame Merle?"

"He never pretended he would prevent it."

"I am glad of that!" cried the girl, gaily. "I wish very much," she presently added, "that when he comes you would tell him first of my engagement."

"Of course I will mention it," said Mrs. Touchett. "I will say nothing more to you about it, but I give you notice I will talk to others."

"That's as you please. I only meant that it is rather better the announcement should come from you than from me."

"I quite agree with you; it is much more proper!"

And on this the two ladies went to breakfast, where Mrs. Touchett was as good as her word, and made no allusion to Gilbert Osmond. After an interval of silence, however, she asked her companion from whom she had received a visit an hour before.

"From an old friend—an American gentleman," Isabel said, with a colour in her cheek.

"An American, of course. It is only an American that calls at ten o'clock in the morning."

"It was half-past ten; he was in a great hurry; he goes away this evening."

"Couldn't he have come yesterday, at the usual time?"

"He only arrived last night."

"He spends but twenty-four hours in Florence?" Mrs. Touchett cried. "He's an American truly."

"He is indeed," said Isabel, thinking with a perverse admiration of what Caspar Goodwood had done for her.

Two days afterward Ralph arrived; but though Isabel was sure that Mrs. Touchett had lost no time in telling him the news, he betrayed at first no knowledge of the great fact. Their first talk was naturally about his health; Isabel had many questions to ask about Corfu. She had been shocked by his appearance when he came into the room; she had forgotten how ill he looked. In spite of Corfu, he looked very ill to-day, and Isabel wondered whether he were really worse or whether she was simply disaccustomed to living with an invalid. Poor Ralph grew no handsomer as he advanced in life, and the now apparently complete loss of his health had done little to mitigate the natural oddity of his person. His face wore its pleasant perpetual smile, which perhaps suggested wit rather than achieved it; his thin whisker languished upon a lean cheek; the exorbitant curve of his nose defined itself more sharply. Lean he was altogether; lean and long and loose-jointed; an accidental cohesion of relaxed angles. His brown velvet jacket had become perennial; his hands had fixed themselves in his pockets; he shambled, and stumbled, and shuffled, in a manner that denoted great physical helplessness. It was perhaps this whimsical gait that helped to mark his character more than ever as that of the humorous invalid—the invalid for whom even his own disabilities are part of the general joke. They might well indeed with Ralph have been the chief cause of the want of seriousness with which he appeared to regard a world in which the reason for his own presence was past finding out. Isabel had grown fond of his ugliness; his awkwardness had become dear to her. These things were endeared by association; they struck her as the conditions of his being so charming. Ralph was so charming that her sense of his being ill had hitherto had a sort of comfort in it; the state of his health had seemed not a limitation, but a kind of intellectual advantage; it absolved

him from all professional and official emotions and left him the luxury of being simply personal. This personality of Ralph's was delightful; it had none of the staleness of disease; it was always easy and fresh and genial. Such had been the girl's impression of her cousin; and when she had pitied him it was only on reflection. As she reflected a good deal she had given him a certain amount of compassion; but Isabel always had a dread of wasting compassion—a precious article, worth more to the giver than to any one else.

Now, however, it took no great ingenuity to discover that poor Ralph's tenure of life was less elastic than it should be. He was a dear, bright, generous fellow; he had all the illumination of wisdom and none of its pedantry, and yet he was dying. Isabel said to herself that life was certainly hard for some people, and she felt a delicate glow of shame as she thought how easy it now promised to become for herself. She was prepared to learn that Ralph was not pleased with her engagement; but she was not prepared, in spite of her affection for her cousin, to let this fact spoil the situation. She was not even prepared—or so she thought—to resent his want of sympathy; for it would be his privilege—it would be indeed his natural line—to find fault with any step she might take toward marriage. One's cousin always pretended to hate one's husband; that was traditional, classical; it was a part of one's cousin's always pretending to adore one. Ralph was nothing if not critical; and though she would certainly, other things being equal, have been as glad to marry to please Ralph as to please any one, it would be absurd to think it important that her choice should square with his views. What were his views, after all? He had pretended to think she had better marry Lord Warburton; but this was only because she had refused that excellent man. If she had accepted him Ralph would certainly have taken another tone; he always took the opposite one. You could criticise any marriage; it was the essence of a marriage to be open to criticism. How well she herself, if she would only give her mind to it, might criticise this union of her own! She had other employment, however, and

Ralph was welcome to relieve her of the care. Isabel was prepared to be wonderfully good-humoured.

He must have seen that, and this made it the more odd that he should say nothing. After three days had elapsed without his speaking, Isabel became impatient; dislike it as he would he might at least go through the form. We who know more about poor Ralph than his cousin, may easily believe that during the hours that followed his arrival at the Palazzo Crescentini, he had privately gone through many forms. His mother had literally greeted him with the great news, which was even more sensibly chilling than Mrs. Touchett's maternal kiss. Ralph was shocked and humiliated; his calculations had been false, and his cousin was lost. He drifted about the house like a rudderless vessel in a rocky stream, or sat in the garden of the palace in a great cane chair, with his long legs extended, his head thrown back, and his hat pulled over his eyes. He felt cold about the heart; he had never liked anything less. What could he do, what could he say? If Isabel were irreclaimable, could he pretend to like it? To attempt to reclaim her was permissible only if the attempt should succeed. To try to persuade her that the man to whom she had pledged her faith was a humbug would be decently discreet only in the event of her being persuaded. Otherwise he should simply have damned himself. It cost him an equal effort to speak his thought and to dissemble; he could neither assent with sincerity nor protest with hope. Meanwhile he knew—or rather he supposed—that the affianced pair were daily renewing their mutual vows. Osmond, at this moment, showed himself little at the Palazzo Crescentini; but Isabel met him every day elsewhere, as she was free to do after their engagement had been made public. She had taken a carriage by the month, so as not to be indebted to her aunt for the means of pursuing a course of which Mrs. Touchett disapproved, and she drove in the morning to the Cascine. This suburban wilderness, during the early hours, was void of all intruders, and our young lady, joined by her lover in its quietest part, strolled with him a while in the grey Italian shade and listened to the nightingales.

CHAPTER XXXIV

ONE morning, on her return from her drive, some half-hour before luncheon, she quitted her vehicle in the court of the palace, and instead of ascending the great staircase, crossed the court, passed beneath another archway, and entered the garden. A sweeter spot, at this moment, could not have been imagined. The stillness of noontide hung over it: the warm shade was motionless, and the hot light made it pleasant. Ralph was sitting there in the clear gloom, at the base of a statue of Terpsichore—a dancing nymph with taper fingers and inflated draperies, in the manner of Bernini; the extreme relaxation of his attitude suggested at first to Isabel that he was asleep. Her light footstep on the grass had not roused him, and before turning away she stood for a moment looking at him. During this instant he opened his eyes; upon which she sat down on a rustic chair that matched with his own. Though in her irritation she had accused him of indifference, she was not blind to the fact that he was visibly preoccupied. But she had attributed his long reveries partly to the languor of his increased weakness, partly to his being troubled about certain arrangements he had made as to the property inherited from his father—arrangements of which Mrs. Touchett disapproved, and which, as she had told Isabel, now encountered opposition from the other partners in the bank. He ought to have gone to England, his mother said, instead of coming to Florence; he had not been there for months, and he took no more interest in the bank than in the state of Patagonia.

"I am sorry I waked you," Isabel said; "you look tired."

"I feel tired. But I was not asleep. I was thinking of you."

"Are you tired of that?"

"Very much so. It leads to nothing. The road is long and I never arrive."

"What do you wish to arrive at?" Isabel said, closing her parasol.

"At the point of expressing to myself properly what I think of your engagement."

"Don't think too much of it," said Isabel, lightly.

"Do you mean that it's none of my business?"

"Beyond a certain point, yes."

"That's the point I was to fix. I had an idea that you have found me wanting in good manners; I have never congratulated you."

"Of course I have noticed that; I wondered why you were silent."

"There have been a good many reasons; I will tell you now," said Ralph.

He pulled off his hat and laid it on the ground; then he sat looking at her. He leaned back, with his head against the marble pedestal of Terpsichore, his arms dropped on either side of him, his hands laid upon the sides of his wide chair. He looked awkward, uncomfortable; he hesitated for a long time. Isabel said nothing; when people were embarrassed she was usually sorry for them; but she was determined not to help Ralph to utter a word that should not be to the honour of her ingenious purpose.

"I think I have hardly got over my surprise," he said at last. "You were the last person I expected to see caught."

"I don't know why you call it caught."

"Because you are going to be put into a cage."

"If I like my cage, that needn't trouble you," said Isabel.

"That's what I wonder at; that's what I have been thinking of."

"If you have been thinking, you may imagine how I have thought! I am satisfied that I am doing well."

"You must have changed immensely. A year ago you valued your liberty beyond everything. You wanted only to see life."

"I have seen it," said Isabel. "It doesn't seem to me so charming."

"I don't pretend it is; only I had an idea that you took a genial view of it and wanted to survey the whole field."

"I have seen that one can't do that. One must choose a corner and cultivate that."

"That's what I think. And one must choose a good corner. I had no idea, all winter, while I read your delightful letters, that you were choosing. You said nothing about it, and your silence put me off my guard."

"It was not a matter I was likely to write to you about. Besides, I knew nothing of the future. It has all come lately. If you had been on your guard, however," Isabel asked, "what would you have done?"

"I should have said—'Wait a little longer.'"

"Wait for what?"

"Well, for a little more light," said Ralph, with a rather absurd smile, while his hands found their way into his pockets.

"Where should my light have come from? From you?"

"I might have struck a spark or two!"

Isabel had drawn off her gloves; she smoothed them out as they lay upon her knee. The gentleness of this movement was accidental, for her expression was not conciliatory.

"You are beating about the bush, Ralph. You wish to say that you don't like Mr. Osmond, and yet you are afraid."

"I am afraid of you, not of him. If you marry him it won't be a nice thing to have said."

"*If* I marry him! Have you had any expectation of dissuading me?"

"Of course that seems to you too fatuous."

"No," said Isabel, after a little; "it seems to me touching."

"That's the same thing. It makes me so ridiculous that you pity me."

Isabel stroked out her long gloves again.

"I know you have a great affection for me. I can't get rid of that."

"For heaven's sake don't try. Keep that well in sight. It will convince you how intensely I want you to do well."

"And how little you trust me!"

There was a moment's silence; the warm noon-tide seemed to listen.

"I trust you, but I don't trust him," said Ralph.

Isabel raised her eyes and gave him a wide, deep look.

"You have said it now; you will suffer for it."

"Not if you are just."

"I am very just," said Isabel. "What better proof of it can there be than that I am not angry with you? I don't know what is the matter with me, but I am not. I was when you began, but it has passed away. Perhaps I ought to be angry, but Mr. Osmond wouldn't think so. He wants me to know everything; that's what I like him for. You have nothing to gain, I know that. I have never been so nice to you, as a girl, that you should have much reason for wishing me to remain one. You give very good advice; you have often done so. No, I am very quiet; I have always believed in your wisdom," Isabel went on, boasting of her quietness, yet speaking with a kind of contained exaltation. It was her passionate desire to be just; it touched Ralph to the heart, affected him like a caress from a creature he had injured. He wished to interrupt, to reassure, her; for a moment he was absurdly inconsistent; he would have retracted what he had said. But she gave him no chance; she went on, having caught a glimpse, as she thought, of the heroic line, and desiring to advance in that direction. "I see you have got some idea; I should like very much to hear it. I am sure it's disinterested; I feel that. It seems a strange thing to argue about, and of course I ought to tell you definitely that if you expect to dissuade me you may give it up. You will not move me at all; it is too late. As you say, I am caught. Certainly it won't be pleasant for you to remember this, but your pain will be in your own thoughts. I shall never reproach you."

"I don't think you ever will," said Ralph. "It is not in the least the sort of marriage I thought you would make."

"What sort of marriage was that, pray?"

"Well, I can hardly say. I hadn't exactly a positive view of it, but I had a negative. I didn't think you would marry a man like Mr. Osmond."

"What do you know against him? You know him scarcely at all."

"Yes," Ralph said, "I know him very little, and I know nothing against him. But all the same I can't help feeling that you are running a risk."

"Marriage is always a risk, and his risk is as great as mine."

"That's his affair! If he is afraid, let him recede; I wish he would."

Isabel leaned back in her chair, folded her arms, and gazed a while at her cousin.

"I don't think I understand you," she said at last, coldly. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"I thought you would marry a man of more importance."

Cold, I say, her tone had been, but at this a colour like a flame leaped into her face.

"Of more importance to whom? It seems to me enough that one's husband should be important to one's self!"

Ralph blushed as well; his attitude embarrassed him. Physically speaking, he proceeded to change it; he straightened himself, then leaned forward, resting a hand on each knee. He fixed his eyes on the ground; he had an air of the most respectful deliberation.

"I will tell you in a moment what I mean," he presently said. He felt agitated, intensely eager; now that he had opened the discussion he wished to discharge his mind. But he wished also to be superlatively gentle.

Isabel waited a little, and then she went on, with majesty.

"In everything that makes one care for people, Mr. Osmond is pre-eminent. There may be nobler natures, but I have never had the pleasure of meeting one. Mr. Osmond is the best I know; he is important enough for me."

"I had a sort of vision of your future," Ralph said, without answering this; "I amused myself with planning out a kind of destiny for you. There was to be nothing of this sort in it. You were not to come down so easily, so soon."

"To come down? What strange expressions you use! Is that your description of my marriage?"

"It expresses my idea of it. You seemed to me to be soaring far up in the blue—to be sailing in the bright light, over the heads of men. Suddenly some one tosses up a faded rosebud—a missile that should never have reached you—and down you drop to the ground. It hurts me," said Ralph, audaciously, "as if *I* had fallen myself!"

The look of pain and bewilderment deepened in his companion's face.

"I don't understand you in the least," she repeated. "You say you amused yourself with planning out my future—I don't understand that. Don't amuse yourself too much, or I shall think you are doing it at my expense."

Ralph shook his head.

"I am not afraid of your not believing that I have had great ideas for you."

"What do you mean by my soaring and sailing?" the girl asked. "I have never moved on a higher line than I am moving on now. There is nothing higher for a girl than to marry a—a person she likes," said poor Isabel, wandering into the didactic.

"It's your liking the person we speak of that I venture to criticise, my dear Isabel! I should have said that the man for you would have been a more active, larger, freer sort of nature." Ralph hesitated a moment, then he added, "I can't get over the belief that there's something small in Osmond."

He had uttered these last words with a tremor of the voice; he was afraid that she would flash out again. But to his surprise she was quiet; she had the air of considering.

"Something small?" she said reflectively.

"I think he's narrow, selfish. He takes himself so seriously!"

"He has a great respect for himself; I don't blame him for that," said Isabel. "It's the proper way to respect others."

Ralph for a moment felt almost reassured by her reasonable tone.

"Yes, but everything is relative; one ought to feel one's relations. I don't think Mr. Osmond does that."

"I have chiefly to do with the relation in which he stands to me. In that he is excellent."

"He is the incarnation of taste," Ralph went on, thinking hard how he could best express Gilbert Osmond's sinister attributes without putting himself in the wrong by seeming to describe him coarsely. He wished to describe him impersonally, scientifically. "He judges and measures, approves and condemns, altogether by that."

"It is a happy thing then that his tastes should be exquisite."

"It is exquisite, indeed, since it has led him to select you as his wife. But have you ever seen an exquisite taste ruffled?"

"I hope it may never be my fortune to fail to gratify my husband's."

At these words a sudden passion leaped to Ralph's lips. "Ah, that's wilful, that's unworthy of you!" he cried. "You were not meant to be measured in that way—you were meant for something better than to keep guard over the sensibilities of a sterile dilettante!"

Isabel rose quickly and Ralph did the same, so that they stood for a moment looking at each other as if he had flung down a defiance or an insult.

"You go too far," she murmured.

"I have said what I had on my mind—and I have said it because I love you!"

Isabel turned pale: was he too on that tiresome list? She had a sudden wish to strike him off. "Ah then, you are not disinterested!"

"I love you, but I love without hope," said Ralph quickly, forcing a smile, and feeling that in that last declaration he had expressed more than he intended.

Isabel moved away and stood looking into the sunny stillness of the garden; but after a little she turned back to him. "I am afraid your talk, then, is the wildness of despair. I don't understand it—but it doesn't matter. I am not arguing with you; it is impossible that I should; I have only tried to listen to you. I am much obliged to you for attempting to explain," she said gently, as if the anger with which she had just sprung up had already subsided. "It is very good of you to try to warn me, if you are really alarmed. But I won't promise to think of what you have said; I shall forget it as soon as possible. Try and forget it yourself; you have done your duty, and no man can do more. I can't explain to you what I feel, what I believe, and I wouldn't if I could." She paused a moment, and then she went on, with an inconsequence that Ralph observed even in the midst of his eagerness to discover some symptom of concession. "I can't enter

into your idea of Mr. Osmond; I can't do it justice, because I see him in quite another way. He is not important—no, he is not important; he is a man to whom importance is supremely indifferent. If that is what you mean when you call him 'small,' then he is as small as you please. I call that large—it's the largest thing I know. I won't pretend to argue with you about a person I am going to marry," Isabel repeated. "I am not in the least concerned to defend Mr. Osmond; he is not so weak as to need my defence. I should think it would seem strange, even to yourself, that I should talk of him so quietly and coldly, as if he were any one else. I would not talk of him at all, to any one but you; and you, after what you have said—I may just answer you once for all. Pray, would you wish me to make a mercenary marriage—what they call a marriage of ambition? I have only one ambition—to be free to follow out a good feeling. I had others once; but they have passed away. Do you complain of Mr. Osmond because he is not rich? That is just what I like him for. I have fortunately money enough; I have never felt so thankful for it as to-day. There have been moments when I should like to go and kneel down by your father's grave; he did perhaps a better thing than he knew when he put it into my power to marry a poor man—a man who has borne his poverty with such dignity, with such indifference. Mr. Osmond has never scrambled nor struggled—he has cared for no worldly prize. If that is to be narrow, if that is to be selfish, then it's very well. I am not frightened by such words, I am not even displeased; I am only sorry that you should make a mistake. Others might have done so, but I am surprised that you should. You might know a gentleman when you see one—you might know a fine mind. Mr. Osmond makes no mistakes! He knows everything, he understands everything, he has the kindest, gentlest, highest spirit. You have got hold of some false idea; it's a pity, but I can't help it; it regards you more than me." Isabel paused a moment, looking at her cousin with an eye illuminated by a sentiment which contradicted the careful calmness of her manner—a mingled sentiment, to which the angry pain excited by his words and the wounded pride of having needed to justify a choice

of which she felt only the nobleness and purity, equally contributed. Though she paused, Ralph said nothing; he saw she had more to say. She was superb, but she was eager; she was indifferent, but she was secretly trembling. "What sort of a person should you have liked me to marry?" she asked suddenly. "You talk about one's soaring and sailing, but if one marries at all one touches the earth. One has human feelings and needs, one has a heart in one's bosom, and one must marry a particular individual. Your mother has never forgiven me for not having come to a better understanding with Lord Warburton, and she is horrified at my contenting myself with a person who has none of Lord Warburton's great advantages—no property, no title, no honours, no houses, nor lands, nor position, nor reputation, nor brilliant belongings of any sort. It is the total absence of all these things that pleases me. Mr. Osmond is simply a man—he is not a proprietor!"

Ralph had listened with great attention, as if everything she said merited deep consideration; but in reality he was only half thinking of the things she said, he was for the rest simply accommodating himself to the weight of his total impression—the impression of her passionate good faith. She was wrong, but she believed; she was deluded, but she was consistent. It was wonderfully characteristic of her that she had invented a fine theory about Gilbert Osmond, and loved him, not for what he really possessed, but for his very poverties dressed out as honours. Ralph remembered what he had said to his father about wishing to put it into Isabel's power to gratify her imagination. He had done so, and the girl had taken full advantage of the privilege.

Poor Ralph felt sick; he felt ashamed. Isabel had uttered her last words with a low solemnity of conviction which virtually terminated the discussion, and she closed it formally by turning away and walking back to the house. Ralph walked beside her, and they passed into the court together and reached the big staircase. Here Ralph stopped, and Isabel paused, turning on him a face full of a deep elation at his opposition having made her own conception of her conduct more clear to her.

"Shall you not come up to breakfast?" she asked.

"No; I want no breakfast, I am not hungry."

"You ought to eat," said the girl; "you live on air."

"I do, very much, and I shall go back into the garden and take another mouthful of it. I came thus far simply to say this. I said to you last year that if you were to get into trouble I should feel terribly sold. That's how I feel to-day."

"Do you think I am in trouble?"

"One is in trouble when one is in error."

"Very well," said Isabel; "I shall never complain of my trouble to you!" And she moved up the staircase.

Ralph, standing there with his hands in his pockets, followed her with his eyes; then the lurking chill of the high-walled court struck him and made him shiver, so that he returned to the garden, to breakfast on the Florentine sunshine.

CHAPTER XXXV

ISABEL, when she strolled in the Cascine with her lover, felt no impulse to tell him that he was not thought well of at the Palazzo Crescentini. The discreet opposition offered to her marriage by her aunt and her cousin made on the whole little impression upon her; the moral of it was simply that they disliked Gilbert Osmond. This dislike was not alarming to Isabel; she scarcely even regretted it; for it served mainly to throw into higher relief the fact, in every way so honourable, that she married to please herself. One did other things to please other people; one did this for a more personal satisfaction; and Isabel's satisfaction was confirmed by her lover's admirable good conduct. Gilbert Osmond was in love, and he had never deserved less than during these still, bright days, each of them numbered, which preceded the fulfilment of his hopes, the harsh criticism passed upon him by Ralph Touchett. The chief impression produced upon Isabel's mind by this criticism was that the passion of love separated its victim terribly from every one but the loved object. She felt herself disjoined from every one she had ever known before—from her two sisters, who wrote to express a dutiful hope that she would be happy, and a surprise, somewhat more vague, at her not having chosen a consort who was the hero of a richer accumulation of anecdote; from Henrietta, who, she was sure, would come out, too late, on purpose to remonstrate; from Lord Warburton, who would certainly console himself, and from Caspar Goodwood, who perhaps would not; from her aunt, who had cold, shallow ideas about marriage, for which she was not sorry to manifest her contempt; and from Ralph, whose talk about having great views for her was surely but a whimsical cover for a personal disappointment. Ralph apparently wished her not to marry at all—that was what it really meant—because he was amused with the spectacle of her adventures as a single woman. His disappointment

made him say angry things about the man she had preferred even to him: Isabel flattered herself that she believed Ralph had been angry. It was the more easy for her to believe this, because, as I say, she thought on the whole but little about it, and accepted as an incident of her lot the idea that to prefer Gilbert Osmond as she preferred him was perforce to break all other ties. She tasted of the sweets of this preference, and they made her feel that there was after all something very invidious in being in love; much as the sentiment was theoretically approved of. It was the tragical side of happiness; one's right was always made of the wrong of some one else. Gilbert Osmond was not demonstrative; the consciousness of success, which must now have flamed high within him, emitted very little smoke for so brilliant a blaze. Contentment, on his part, never took a vulgar form; excitement, in the most self-conscious of men, was a kind of ecstasy of self-control. This disposition, however, made him an admirable lover; it gave him a constant view of the amorous character. He never forgot himself, as I say; and so he never forgot to be graceful and tender, to wear the appearance of devoted intention. He was immensely pleased with his young lady; Madame Merle had made him a present of incalculable value. What could be a finer thing to live with than a high spirit attuned to softness? For would not the softness be all for one's self, and the strenuousness for society, which admired the air of superiority? What could be a happier gift in a companion than a quick, fanciful mind, which saved one repetitions, and reflected one's thought upon a scintillating surface. Osmond disliked to see his thought reproduced literally—that made it look stale and stupid; he preferred it to be brightened in the reproduction. His egotism, if egotism it was, had never taken the crude form of wishing for a dull wife; this lady's intelligence was to be a silver plate, not an earthen one—a plate that he might heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that conversation might become a sort of perpetual dessert. He found the silvery quality in perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring. He knew perfectly, though he had not been told, that the union found little favour

among the girl's relations; but he had always treated her so completely as an independent person that it hardly seemed necessary to express regret for the attitude of her family. Nevertheless, one morning, he made an abrupt allusion to it.

"It's the difference in our fortune they don't like," he said. "They think I am in love with your money."

"Are you speaking of my aunt—of my cousin?" Isabel asked. "How do you know what they think?"

"You have not told me that they are pleased, and when I wrote to Mrs. Touchett the other day she never answered my note. If they had been delighted I should have learnt it, and the fact of my being poor and you rich is the most obvious explanation of their want of delight. But, of course, when a poor man marries a rich girl he must be prepared for imputations. I don't mind them; I only care for one thing—your thinking it's all right. I don't care what others think. I have never cared much, and why should I begin to-day, when I have taken to myself a compensation for everything? I won't pretend that I am sorry you are rich; I am delighted. I delight in everything that is yours—whether it be money or virtue. Money is a great advantage. It seems to me, however, that I have sufficiently proved that I can get on without it; I never in my life tried to earn a penny, and I ought to be less subject to suspicion than most people. I suppose it is their business to suspect—that of your own family; it's proper on the whole they should. They will like me better some day; so will you, for that matter. Meanwhile my business is not to bother, but simply to be thankful for life and love. It has made me better, loving you," he said on another occasion; "it has made me wiser, and easier, and brighter. I used to want a great many things before, and to be angry that I didn't have them. Theoretically, I was satisfied, as I once told you. I flattered myself that I had limited my wants. But I was subject to irritation; I used to have morbid, sterile, hateful fits of hunger, of desire. Now I am really satisfied, because I can't think of anything better. It is just as when one has been trying to spell out a book in the twilight, and suddenly the lamp comes in. I had been putting out my eyes over the book of life, and find-

ing nothing to reward me for my pains; but now that I can read it properly I see that it's a delightful story. My dear girl, I can't tell you how life seems to stretch there before us—what a long summer afternoon awaits us. It's the latter half of an Italian day—with a golden haze, and the shadows just lengthening, and that divine delicacy in the light, the air, the landscape, which I have loved all my life, and which you love to-day. Upon my word, I don't see why we shouldn't get on. We have got what we like—to say nothing of having each other. We have the faculty of admiration, and several excellent beliefs. We are not stupid, we are not heavy, we are not under bonds to any dull limitations. You are very fresh, and I am well-seasoned. We have got my poor child to amuse us; we will try and make up some little life for her. It is all soft and mellow—it has the Italian colouring."

They made a good many plans, but they left themselves also a good deal of latitude; it was a matter of course, however, that they should live for the present in Italy. It was in Italy that they had met, Italy had been a party to their first impressions of each other, and Italy should be a party to their happiness. Osmond had the attachment of old acquaintance, and Isabel the stimulus of new, which seemed to assure her a future of beautiful hours. The desire for unlimited expansion had been succeeded in her mind by the sense that life was vacant without some private duty which gathered one's energies to a point. She told Ralph that she had "seen life" in a year or two, and that she was already tired, not of life, but of observation. What had become of all her ardours, her aspirations, her theories, her high estimate of her independence, and her incipient conviction that she should never marry? These things had been absorbed in a more primitive sentiment—a sentiment which answered all questions, satisfied all needs, solved all difficulties. It simplified the future at a stroke, it came down from above, like the light of the stars, and it needed no explanation. There was explanation enough in the fact that he was her lover, her own, and that she was able to be of use to him. She could marry him with a kind of pride; she was not only taking but giving.

He brought Pansy with him two or three times to the Cascine—Pansy who was very little taller than a year before, and not much older. That she would always be a child was the conviction expressed by her father, who held her by the hand when she was in her sixteenth year, and told her to go and play while he sat down a while with the pretty lady. Pansy wore a short dress and a long coat; her hat always seemed too big for her. She amused herself with walking off, with quick, short steps, to the end of the alley, and then walking back with a smile that seemed an appeal for approbation. Isabel gave her approbation in abundance, and it was of that demonstrated personal kind which the child's affectionate nature craved. She watched her development with a kind of amused suspense. Pansy had already become a little daughter. She was treated so completely as a child that Osmond had not yet explained to her the new relation in which he stood to the elegant Miss Archer. "She doesn't know," he said to Isabel; "she doesn't suspect; she thinks it perfectly natural that you and I should come and walk here together, simply as good friends. There seems to me something enchantingly innocent in that; it's the way I like her to be. No, I am not a failure, as I used to think; I have succeeded in two things. I am to marry the woman I adore, and I have brought up my child as I wished, in the old way."

He was very fond, in all things, of the "old way;" that had struck Isabel as an element in the refinement of his character.

"It seems to me you will not know whether you have succeeded until you have told her," she said. "You must see how she takes your news. She may be horrified—she may be jealous."

"I am not afraid of that; she is too fond of you on her own account. I should like to leave her in the dark a little longer—to see if it will come into her head that if we are not engaged we ought to be."

Isabel was impressed by Osmond's æsthetic relish of Pansy's innocence—her own appreciation of it being more moral. She was perhaps not the less pleased when he told her a few days later that he had broken the news to his daughter, who made such a pretty little speech. "Oh, then I shall have a

sister!" She was neither surprised nor alarmed; she had not cried, as he expected.

"Perhaps she had guessed it," said Isabel.

"Don't say that; I should be disgusted if I believed that. I thought it would be just a little shock; but the way she took it proves that her good manners are paramount. That is also what I wished. You shall see for yourself; to-morrow she shall make you her congratulations in person."

The meeting, on the morrow, took place at the Countess Gemini's, whither Pansy had been conducted by her father, who knew that Isabel was to come in the afternoon to return a visit made her by the Countess on learning that they were to become sister-in-law. Calling at Casa Touchett, the visitor had not found Isabel at home; but after our young lady had been ushered into the Countess's drawing-room, Pansy came in to say that her aunt would presently appear. Pansy was spending the day with her aunt, who thought she was of an age when she should begin to learn how to carry herself in company. It was Isabel's view that the little girl might have given lessons in deportment to the elder lady, and nothing could have justified this conviction more than the manner in which Pansy acquitted herself while they waited together for the Countess. Her father's decision, the year before, had finally been to send her back to the convent to receive the last graces, and Madame Catherine had evidently carried out her theory that Pansy was to be fitted for the great world.

"Papa has told me that you have kindly consented to marry him," said the good woman's pupil. "It is very delightful; I think you will suit very well."

"You think I shall suit you?"

"You will suit me beautifully; but what I mean is that you and papa will suit each other. You are both so quiet and so serious. You are not so quiet as he—or even as Madame Merle; but you are more quiet than many others. He should not, for instance, have a wife like my aunt. She is always moving; to-day especially; you will see when she comes in. They told us at the convent it was wrong to judge our elders, but I suppose there is no harm if we judge them favourably. You will be a delightful companion for papa."

"For you too, I hope," Isabel said.

"I speak first of him on purpose. I have told you already what I myself think of you; I liked you from the first. I admire you so much that I think it will be a great good fortune to have you always before me. You will be my model; I shall try to imitate you—though I am afraid it will be very feeble. I am very glad for papa—he needed something more than me. Without you, I don't see how he could have got it. You will be my stepmother; but we must not use that word. You don't look at all like the word; it is somehow so ugly. They are always said to be cruel; but I think you will never be cruel. I am not afraid."

"My good little Pansy," said Isabel, gently, "I shall be very kind to you."

"Very well then; I have nothing to fear," the child declared, lightly.

Her description of her aunt had not been incorrect; the Countess Gemini was less than ever in a state of repose. She entered the room with a great deal of expression, and kissed Isabel, first on the lips, and then on each cheek, in the short, quick manner of a bird drinking. She made Isabel sit down on the sofa beside her, and looking at our heroine with a variety of turns of the head, delivered herself of a hundred remarks, from which I offer the reader but a brief selection.

"If you expect me to congratulate you, I must beg you to excuse me. I don't suppose you care whether I do or not: I believe you are very proud. But I care myself whether I tell fibs or not; I never tell them unless there is something to be gained. I don't see what there is to be gained with you—especially as you would not believe me. I don't make phrases—I never made a phrase in my life. My fibs are always very crude. I am very glad, for my own sake, that you are going to marry Osmond; but I won't pretend I am glad for yours. You are very remarkable—you know that's what people call you; you are an heiress, and very good-looking and clever, very original; so it's a good thing to have you in the family. Our family is very good, you know; Osmond will have told you that; and my mother was rather distinguished—she was called the American Corinne. But we are rather fallen, I think, and perhaps you will pick us

up. I have great confidence in you; there are ever so many things I want to talk to you about. I never congratulate any girl on marrying; I think it's the worst thing she can do. I suppose Pansy oughtn't to hear all this; but that's what she has come to me for—to acquire the tone of society. There is no harm in her knowing that it isn't such a blessing to get married. When first I got an idea that my brother had designs upon you, I thought of writing to you, to recommend you, in the strongest terms, not to listen to him. Then I thought it would be disloyal, and I hate anything of that kind. Besides, as I say, I was enchanted, for myself; and after all, I am very selfish. By the way, you won't respect me, and we shall never be intimate. I should like it, but you won't. Some day, all the same, we shall be better friends than you will believe at first. My husband will come and see you, though, as you probably know, he is on no sort of terms with Osmond. He is very fond of going to see pretty women, but I am not afraid of you. In the first place, I don't care what he does. In the second, you won't care a straw for him; you will take his measure at a glance. Some day I will tell you all about him. Do you think my niece ought to go out of the room? Pansy, go and practise a little in my boudoir."

"Let her stay, please," said Isabel. "I would rather hear nothing that Pansy may not!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

ONE afternoon, towards dusk, in the autumn of 1876, a young man of pleasing appearance rang at the door of a small apartment on the third floor of an old Roman house. On its being opened he inquired for Madame Merle, whereupon the servant, a neat, plain woman, with a French face and a lady's maid's manner, ushered him into a diminutive drawing-room and requested the favour of his name.

"Mr. Edward Rosier," said the young man, who sat down to wait till his hostess should appear.

The reader will perhaps not have forgotten that Mr. Rosier was an ornament of the American circle in Paris, but it may also be remembered that he sometimes vanished from its horizon. He had spent a portion of several winters at Pau, and as he was a gentleman of tolerable inveterate habits he might have continued for years to pay his annual visit to this charming resort. In the summer of 1876, however, an incident befell him which changed the current, not only of his thoughts, but of his proceedings. He passed a month in the Upper Engadine, and encountered at St. Moritz a charming young girl. For this young lady he conceived a peculiar admiration; she was exactly the household angel he had long been looking for. He was never precipitate; he was nothing if not discreet; so he forebore for the present to declare his passion; but it seemed to him when they parted—the young lady to go down into Italy, and her admirer to proceed to Geneva, where he was under bonds to join some friends—that he should be very unhappy if he were not to see her again. The simplest way to do so was to go in the autumn to Rome, where Miss Osmond was domiciled with her family. Rosier started on his pilgrimage to the Italian capital and reached it on the first of November. It was a pleasant thing to do; but for the young man there was a strain of the heroic in the enterprise. He was nervous about the fever,

and November, after all, was rather early in the season. Fortune, however, favours the brave; and Mr. Rosier, who took three grains of quinine every day, had at the end of a month no cause to deplore his temerity. He had made to a certain extent good use of his time; that is, he had perceived that Miss Pansy Osmond had not a flaw in her composition. She was admirably finished—she was in excellent style. He thought of her in amorous meditation a good deal as he might have thought of a Dresden-china shepherdess. Miss Osmond, indeed, in the bloom of her juvenility, had a touch of the rococo, which Rosier, whose taste was predominantly for that manner, could not fail to appreciate. That he esteemed the productions of comparatively frivolous periods would have been apparent from the attention he bestowed upon Madame Merle's drawing-room, which, although furnished with specimens of every style, was especially rich in articles of the last two centuries. He had immediately put a glass into one eye and looked round; and then—"By Jove! she has some jolly good things!" he had murmured to himself. The room was small, and densely filled with furniture; it gave an impression of faded silk and little statuettes which might totter if one moved. Rosier got up and wandered about with his careful tread, bending over the tables charged with knick-knacks and the cushions embossed with princely arms. When Madame Merle came in she found him standing before the fireplace, with his nose very close to the great lace flounce attached to the damask cover of the mantel. He had lifted it delicately, as if he were smelling it.

"It's old Venetian," she said; "it's rather good."

"It's too good for this; you ought to wear it."

"They tell me you have some better in Paris, in the same situation."

"Ah, but I can't wear mine," said Rosier, smiling.

"I don't see why you shouldn't! I have better lace than that to wear."

Rosier's eyes wandered, lingeringly, round the room again

"You have some very good things."

"Yes, but I hate them."

"Do you want to get rid of them?" the young man asked quickly.

"No, it's good to have something to hate; one works it off."

"I love my things," said Rosier, as he sat there smiling. "But it's not about them—nor about yours, that I came to talk to you." He paused a moment, and then, with greater softness—"I care more for Miss Osmond than for all the *bibelots* in Europe!"

Madame Merle started a little.

"Did you come to tell me that?"

"I came to ask your advice."

She looked at him with a little frown, stroking her chin.

"A man in love, you know, doesn't ask advice."

"Why not, if he is in a difficult position? That's often the case with a man in love. I have been in love before, and I know. But never so much as this time—really, never so much. I should like particularly to know what you think of my prospects. I'm afraid Mr. Osmond doesn't think me a phœnix."

"Do you wish me to intercede?" Madame Merle asked, with her fine arms folded, and her mouth drawn up to the left.

"If you could say a good word for me, I should be greatly obliged. There will be no use in my troubling Miss Osmond unless I have good reason to believe her father will consent."

"You are very considerate; that's in your favour. But you assume, in rather an off-hand way, that I think you a prize."

"You have been very kind to me," said the young man. "That's why I came."

"I am always kind to people who have good *bibelots;* there is no telling what one may get by it."

And the left-hand corner of Madame Merle's mouth gave expression to the joke.

Edward Rosier stared and blushed; his correct features were suffused with disappointment.

"Ah, I thought you liked me for myself!"

"I like you very much; but, if you please, we won't analyse. Excuse me if I seem patronising; but I think you a perfect little gentleman. I must tell you, however, that I have not the marrying of Pansy Osmond."

"I didn't suppose that. But you have seemed to me intimate with her family, and I thought you might have influence."

Madame Merle was silent a moment.

"Whom do you call her family?"

"Why, her father; and—how do you say it in English?—her *belle-mère*."

"Mr. Osmond is her father, certainly; but his wife can scarcely be termed a member of her family. Mrs. Osmond has nothing to do with marrying her."

"I am sorry for that," said Rosier, with an amiable sigh. "I think Mrs. Osmond would favour me."

"Very likely—if her husband does not."

Edward Rosier raised his eyebrows.

"Does she take the opposite line from him?"

"In everything. They think very differently."

"Well," said Rosier, "I am sorry for that; but it's none of my business. She is very fond of Pansy."

"Yes, she is very fond of Pansy."

"And Pansy has a great affection for her. She has told me that she loves her as if she were her own mother."

"You must, after all, have had some very intimate talk with the poor child," said Madame Merle. "Have you declared your sentiments?"

"Never!" cried Rosier, lifting his neatly-gloved hand. "Never, until I have assured myself of those of the parents."

"You always wait for that? You have excellent principles; your conduct is most estimable."

"I think you are laughing at me," poor Rosier murmured, dropping back in his chair, and feeling his small moustache. "I didn't expect that of you, Madame Merle."

She shook her head calmly, like a person who saw things clearly.

"You don't do me justice. I think your conduct is in excellent taste and the best you could adopt. Yes, that's what I think."

"I wouldn't agitate her—only to agitate her; I love her too much for that," said Ned Rosier.

"I am glad, after all, that you have told me," Madame Merle went on. "Leave it to me a little; I think I can help you."

"I said you were the person to come to!" cried the young man, with an ingenuous radiance in his face.

"You were very clever," Madame Merle returned, more drily. "When I say I can help you, I mean once assuming that your cause is good. Let us think a little whether it is."

"I'm a dear little fellow," said Rosier, earnestly. "I won't say I have no faults, but I will say I have no vices."

"All that is negative. What is the positive side? What have you got besides your Spanish lace and your Dresden tea-cups?"

"I have got a comfortable little fortune—about forty thousand francs a year. With the talent that I have for arranging, we can live beautifully on such an income."

"Beautifully, no. Sufficiently, yes. Even that depends on where you live."

"Well, in Paris. I would undertake it in Paris."

Madame Merle's mouth rose to the left.

"It wouldn't be splendid; you would have to make use of the tea-cups, and they would get broken."

"We don't want to be splendid. If Miss Osmond should have everything pretty, it would be enough. When one is as pretty as she, one can afford to be simple. She ought never to wear anything but muslin," said Rosier, reflectively.

"She would be much obliged to you for that theory."

"It's the correct one, I assure you; and I am sure she would enter into it. She understands all that; that's why I love her."

"She is a very good little girl, and extremely graceful. But her father, to the best of my belief, can give her nothing."

Rosier hesitated a moment.

"I don't in the least desire that he should. But I may remark, all the same, that he lives like a rich man."

"The money is his wife's; she brought him a fortune."

"Mrs. Osmond, then, is very fond of her step-daughter; she may do something."

"For a love-sick swain you have your eyes about you!" Madame Merle exclaimed, with a laugh.

"I esteem a *dot* very much. I can do without it, but I esteem it."

"Mrs. Osmond," Madame Merle went on, "will probably prefer to keep her money for her own children."

"Her own children? Surely she has none."

"She may have yet. She had a poor little boy, who died two years ago, six months after his birth. Others, therefore, may come."

"I hope they will, if it will make her happy. She is a splendid woman."

Madame Merle was silent a moment.

"Ah, about her there is much to be said. Splendid as you like! We have not exactly made out that you are a *parti*. The absence of vices is hardly a source of income."

"Excuse me, I think it may be," said Rosier, with his persuasive smile.

"You'll be a touching couple, living on your innocence!"

"I think you underrate me."

"You are not so innocent as that? Seriously," said Madame Merle, "of course forty thousand francs a year and a nice character are a combination to be considered. I don't say it's to be jumped at; but there might be a worse offer. Mr. Osmond will probably incline to believe he can do better."

"He can do so perhaps; but what can his daughter do? She can't do better than marry the man she loves. For she does, you know," Rosier added, eagerly.

"She does—I know it."

"Ah," cried the young man, "I said you were the person to come to."

"But I don't know how you know it, if you haven't asked her," Madame Merle went on.

"In such a case there is no need of asking and telling; as you say, we are an innocent couple. How did *you* know it?"

"I who am not innocent? By being very crafty. Leave it to me; I will find out for you."

Rosier got up, and stood smoothing his hat.

"You say that rather coldly. Don't simply find out how it is, but try to make it as it should be."

"I will do my best. I will try to make the most of your advantages."

"Thank you so very much. Meanwhile, I will say a word to Mrs. Osmond."

"Gardez-vous en bien!" And Madame Merle rose, rapidly. "Don't set her going, or you'll spoil everything."

Rosier gazed into his hat; he wondered whether his hostess had been after all the right person to come to.

"I don't think I understand you. I am an old friend of Mrs. Osmond, and I think she would like me to succeed."

"Be an old friend as much as you like; the more old friends she has the better, for she doesn't get on very well with some of her new. But don't for the present try to make her take up the cudgels for you. Her husband may have other views, and, as a person who wishes her well, I advise you not to multiply points of difference between them."

Poor Rosier's face assumed an expression of alarm; a suit for the hand of Pansy Osmond was even a more complicated business than his taste for proper transitions had allowed. But the extreme good sense which he concealed under a surface suggesting sprigged porcelain, came to his assistance.

"I don't see that I am bound to consider Mr. Osmond so much!" he exclaimed.

"No, but you should consider her. You say you are an old friend. Would you make her suffer?"

"Not for the world."

"Then be very careful, and let the matter alone until I have taken a few soundings."

"Let the matter alone, dear Madame Merle? Remember that I am in love."

"Oh, you won't burn up. Why did you come to me, if you are not to heed what I say?"

"You are very kind; I will be very good," the young man promised. "But I am afraid Mr. Osmond is rather difficult," he added, in his mild voice, as he went to the door.

Madame Merle gave a light laugh.

"It has been said before. But his wife is not easy either."

"Ah, she's a splendid woman!" Ned Rosier repeated, passing out.

He resolved that his conduct should be worthy of a young man who was already a model of discretion; but he saw nothing in any pledge he had given Madame Merle that made it improper he should keep himself in spirits by an

occasional visit to Miss Osmond's home. He reflected constantly on what Madame Merle had said to him, and turned over in his mind the impression of her somewhat peculiar manner. He had gone to her *de confiance*, as they said in Paris; but it was possible that he had been precipitate. He found difficulty in thinking of himself as rash—he had incurred this reproach so rarely; but it certainly was true that he had known Madame Merle only for the last month, and that his thinking her a delightful woman was not, when one came to look into it, a reason for assuming that she would be eager to push Pansy Osmond into his arms—gracefully arranged as these members might be to receive her. Beyond this, Madame Merle had been very gracious to him, and she was a person of consideration among the girl's people, where she had a rather striking appearance (Rosier had more than once wondered how she managed it), of being intimate without being familiar. But possibly he had exaggerated these advantages. There was no particular reason why she should take trouble for him; a charming woman was charming to every one, and Rosier felt rather like a fool when he thought of his appealing to Madame Merle on the ground that she had distinguished him. Very likely—though she had appeared to say it in joke—she was really only thinking of his *bibelots*. Had it come into her head that he might offer her two or three of the gems of his collection? If she would only help him to marry Miss Osmond, he would present her with his whole museum. He could hardly say so to her outright; it would seem too gross a bribe. But he should like her to believe it.

It was with these thoughts that he went again to Mrs. Osmond's, Mrs. Osmond having an "evening"—she had taken the Thursday of each week—when his presence could be accounted for on general principles of civility. The object of Mr. Rosier's well-regulated affection dwelt in a high house in the very heart of Rome; a dark and massive structure, overlooking a sunny *piazzetta* in the neighbourhood of the Farnese Palace. In a palace, too, little Pansy lived—a palace in Roman parlance, but a dungeon to poor Rosier's apprehensive mind. It seemed to him of evil omen that the young lady he wished to marry, and whose fastidious

father he doubted of his ability to conciliate, should be immured in a kind of domestic fortress, which bore a stern old Roman name, which smelt of historic deeds, of crime and craft and violence, which was mentioned in "Murray" and visited by tourists who looked disappointed and depressed, and which had frescoes by Caravaggio in the *piano nobile* and a row of mutilated statues and dusty urns in the wide, nobly-arched loggia overlooking the damp court where a fountain gushed out of a mossy niche. In a less preoccupied frame of mind he could have done justice to the Palazzo Roccanera; he could have entered into the sentiment of Mrs. Osmond, who had once told him that on settling themselves in Rome she and her husband chose this habitation for the love of local colour. It had local colour enough, and though he knew less about architecture than about Limoges enamel, he could see that the proportions of the windows, and even the details of the cornice, had quite the grand air. But Rosier was haunted by the conviction that at picturesque periods young girls had been shut up there to keep them from their true loves, and, under the threat of being thrown into convents, had been forced into unholy marriages. There was one point, however, to which he always did justice when once he found himself in Mrs. Osmond's warm, rich-looking reception-rooms, which were on the second floor. He acknowledged that these people were very strong in *bibelots*. It was a taste of Osmond's own—not at all of hers; this she had told him the first time he came to the house, when, after asking himself for a quarter of an hour whether they had better things than he, he was obliged to admit that they had, very much, and vanquished his envy, as a gentleman should, to the point of expressing to his hostess his pure admiration of her treasures. He learned from Mrs. Osmond that her husband had made a large collection before their marriage, and that, though he had obtained a number of fine pieces within the last three years, he had got his best things at a time when he had not the advantage of her advice. Rosier interpreted this information according to principles of his own. For "advice" read "money," he said to himself; and the fact that Gilbert Osmond had landed his great prizes during his impecunious

season, confirmed his most cherished doctrine—the doctrine that a collector may freely be poor if he be only patient. In general, when Rosier presented himself on a Thursday evening, his first glance was bestowed upon the walls of the room; there were three or four objects that his eyes really yearned for. But after his talk with Madame Merle he felt the extreme seriousness of his position; and now, when he came in, he looked about for the daughter of the house with such eagerness as might be permitted to a gentleman who always crossed a threshold with an optimistic smile.

CHAPTER XXXVII

PANSY was not in the first of the rooms, a large apartment with a concave ceiling and walls covered with old red damask; it was here that Mrs. Osmond usually sat—though she was not in her usually customary place to-night—and that a circle of more especial intimates gathered about the fire. The room, was warm, with a sort of subdued brightness; it contained the larger things, and—almost always—an odour of flowers. Pansy on this occasion was presumably in the chamber beyond, the resort of younger visitors, where tea was served. Osmond stood before the chimney, leaning back, with his hands behind him; he had one foot up and was warming the sole. Half-a-dozen people, scattered near him. were talking together; but he was not in the conversation; his eyes were fixed, abstractedly. Rosier, coming in unannounced, failed to attract his attention; but the young man, who was very punctilious, though he was even exceptionally conscious that it was the wife, not the husband, he had come to see, went up to shake hands with him. Osmond put out his left hand, without changing his attitude.

"How d'ye do? My wife's somewhere about."

"Never fear; I shall find her," said Rosier, cheerfully.

Osmond stood looking at him; he had never before felt the keenness of this gentleman's eyes. "Madame Merle has told him, and he doesn't like it," Rosier said to himself. He had hoped Madame Merle would be there; but she was not within sight; perhaps she was in one of the other rooms, or would come later. He had never especially delighted in Gilbert Osmond; he had a fancy that he gave himself airs. But Rosier was not quickly resentful, and where politeness was concerned he had an inveterate wish to be in the right. He looked round him, smiling, and then, in a moment, he said—

"I saw a jolly good piece of Capo di Monte to-day."

Osmond answered nothing at first; but presently, while he warmed his boot-sole, "I don't care a fig for Capo di Monte!" he returned.

"I hope you are not losing your interest?"

"In old pots and plates? Yes, I am losing my interest."

Rosier for a moment forgot the delicacy of his position.

"You are not thinking of parting with a—a piece or two?"

"No, I am not thinking of parting with anything at all, Mr. Rosier," said Osmond, with his eyes still on the eyes of his visitor.

"Ah, you want to keep, but not to add," Rosier remarked, brightly.

"Exactly. I have nothing that I wish to match."

Poor Rosier was aware that he had blushed, and he was distressed at his want of assurance. "Ah, well, I have!" was all that he could murmur; and he knew that his murmur was partly lost as he turned away. He took his course to the adjoining room, and met Mrs. Osmond coming out of the deep doorway. She was dressed in black velvet; she looked brilliant and noble. We know what Mr. Rosier thought of her, and the terms in which, to Madame Merle, he had expressed his admiration. Like his appreciation of her dear little stepdaughter, it was based partly on his fine sense of the plastic; but also on a relish for a more impalpable sort of merit—that merit of a bright spirit, which Rosier's devotion to brittle wares had not made him cease to regard as a quality. Mrs. Osmond, at present, might well have gratified such tastes. The years had touched her only to enrich her; the flower of her youth had not faded, it only hung more quietly on its stem. She had lost something of that quick eagerness to which her husband had privately taken exception—she had more the air of being able to wait. Now, at all events, framed in the gilded doorway she struck our young man as the picture of a gracious lady.

"You see I am very regular," he said. "But who should be if I am not?"

"Yes, I have known you longer than any one here. But we must not indulge in tender reminiscences. I want to introduce you to a young lady."

"Ah, please, what young lady?" Rosier was immensely obliging; but this was not what he had come for.

"She sits there by the fire in pink, and has no one to speak to."

Rosier hesitated a moment.

"Can't Mr. Osmond speak to her? He is within six feet of her."

Mrs. Osmond also hesitated.

"She is not very lively, and he doesn't like dull people."

"But she is good enough for me? Ah now, that is hard."

"I only mean that you have ideas for two. And then you are so obliging."

"So is your husband."

"No, he is not—to me." And Mrs. Osmond smiled vaguely.

"That's a sign he should be doubly so to other women."

"So I tell him," said Mrs. Osmond, still smiling.

"You see I want some tea," Rosier went on, looking wistfully beyond.

"That's perfect. Go and give some to my young lady."

"Very good; but after that I will abandon her to her fate. The simple truth is that I am dying to have a little talk with Miss Osmond."

"Ah," said Isabel, turning away, "I can't help you there!"

Five minutes later, while he handed a tea-cup to the young lady in pink, whom he had conducted into the other room, he wondered whether, in making to Mrs. Osmond the profession I have just quoted, he had broken the spirit of his promise to Madame Merle. Such a question was capable of occupying this young man's mind for a considerable time. At last, however, he became—comparatively speaking—reckless, and cared little what promises he might break. The fate to which he had threatened to abandon the young lady in pink proved to be none so terrible; for Pansy Osmond, who had given him the tea for his companion—Pansy was as fond as ever of making tea—presently came and talked to her. Into this mild colloquy Edward Rosier entered little; he sat by moodily, watching his small sweetheart. If we look at her now through his eyes, we shall at first not see much to remind us of the obedient little girl who, at Florence, three years before, was sent to walk short distances in the Cascine

while her father and Miss Archer talked together of matters sacred to elder people. But after a moment we shall perceive that if at nineteen Pansy has become a young lady, she does not really fill out the part; that if she has grown very pretty, she lacks in a deplorable degree the quality known and esteemed in the appearance of females as style; and that if she is dressed with great freshness, she wears her smart attire with an undisguised appearance of saving it —very much as if it were lent her for the occasion. Edward Rosier, it would seem, would have been just the man to note these defects; and in point of fact there was not a quality of this young lady, of any sort, that he had not noted. Only he called her qualities by names of his own—some of which indeed were happy enough. "No, she is unique—she is absolutely unique," he used to say to himself; and you may be sure that not for an instant would he have admitted to you that she was wanting in style. Style? Why, she had the style of a little princess; if you couldn't see it you had no eye. It was not modern, it was not conscious, it would produce no impression in Broadway; the small, serious damsel, in her stiff little dress, only looked like an Infanta of Velasquez. This was enough for Edward Rosier, who thought her delightfully old-fashioned. Her anxious eyes, her charming lips, her slip of a figure, were as touching as a childish prayer. He had now an acute desire to know just to what point she liked him—a desire which made him fidget as he sat in his chair. It made him feel hot, so that he had to pat his forehead with his handkerchief; he had never been so uncomfortable. She was such a perfect *jeune fille;* and one couldn't make of a *jeune fille* the inquiry necessary for throwing light on such a point. A *jeune fille* was what Rosier had always dreamed of—a *jeune fille* who should yet not be French, for he had felt that this nationality would complicate the question. He was sure that Pansy had never looked at a newspaper, and that, in the way of novels, if she had read Sir Walter Scott it was the very most. An American *jeune fille;* what would be better than that? She would be frank and gay, and yet would not have walked alone, nor have received letters from men, nor have been taken to the theatre to see the comedy of manners. Rosier

could not deny that, as the matter stood, it would be a breach of hospitality to appeal directly to this unsophisticated creature; but he was now in imminent danger of asking himself whether hospitality were the most sacred thing in the world. Was not the sentiment that he entertained for Miss Osmond of infinitely greater importance? Of greater importance to him—yes; but not probably to the master of the house. There was one comfort; even if this gentleman had been placed on his guard by Madame Merle, he would not have extended the warning to Pansy; it would not have been part of his policy to let her know that a prepossessing young man was in love with her. But he *was* in love with her, the prepossessing young man; and all these restrictions of circumstance had ended by irritating him. What had Gilbert Osmond meant by giving him two fingers of his left hand? If Osmond was rude, surely he himself might be bold. He felt extremely bold after the dull girl in pink had responded to the call of her mother, who came in to say, with a significant simper at Rosier, that she must carry her off to other triumphs. The mother and daughter departed together, and now it depended only upon him that he should be virtually alone with Pansy. He had never been alone with her before; he had never been alone with a *jeune fille*. It was a great moment; poor Rosier began to pat his forehead again. There was another room, beyond the one in which they stood—a small room which had been thrown open and lighted, but, the company not being numerous, had remained empty all the evening. It was empty yet; it was upholstered in pale yellow; there were several lamps; through the open door it looked very pretty. Rosier stood a moment, gazing through this aperture; he was afraid that Pansy would run away, and felt almost capable of stretching out a hand to detain her. But she lingered where the young lady in pink had left them, making no motion to join a knot of visitors on the other side of the room. For a moment it occurred to him that she was frightened—too frightened perhaps to move; but a glance assured him that she was not, and then he reflected that she was too innocent, indeed, for that. After a moment's supreme hesitation he asked her whether he might go and look at the yellow room, which seemed so attractive

yet so virginal. He had been there already with Osmond, to inspect the furniture, which was of the First French Empire, and especially to admire the clock (which he did not really admire), an immense classic structure of that period. He therefore felt that he had now begun to manœuvre.

"Certainly, you may go," said Pansy; "and if you like, I will show you." She was not in the least frightened.

"That's just what I hoped you would say; you are so very kind," Rosier murmured.

They went in together; Rosier really thought the room very ugly, and it seemed cold. The same idea appeared to have struck Pansy.

"It's not for winter evenings; it's more for summer," she said. "It's papa's taste; he has so much."

He had a good deal, Rosier thought; but some of it was bad. He looked about him; he hardly knew what to say in such a situation. "Doesn't Mrs. Osmond care how her rooms are done? Has she no taste?" he asked.

"Oh yes, a great deal; but it's more for literature," said Pansy—"and for conversation. But papa cares also for those things: I think he knows everything."

Rosier was silent a moment. "There is one thing I am sure he knows!" he broke out presently. "He knows that when I come here it is, with all respect to him, with all respect to Mrs. Osmond, who is so charming—it is really," said the young man, "to see you!"

"To see me?" asked Pansy, raising her vaguely-troubled eyes.

"To see you; that's what I come for," Rosier repeated, feeling the intoxication of a rupture with authority. Pansy stood looking at him, simply, intently, openly; a blush was not needed to make her face more modest.

"I thought it was for that," she said.

"And it was not disagreeable to you?"

"I couldn't tell; I didn't know. You never told me," said Pansy.

"I was afraid of offending you."

"You don't offend me," the young girl murmured, smiling as if an angel had kissed her.

"You like me then, Pansy?" Rosier asked, very gently, feeling very happy.

"Yes—I like you."

They had walked to the chimney-piece, where the big cold Empire clock was perched; they were well within the room, and beyond observation from without. The tone in which she had said these four words seemed to him the very breath of nature, and his only answer could be to take her hand and hold it a moment. Then he raised it to his lips. She submitted, still with her pure, trusting smile, in which there was something ineffably passive. She liked him—she had liked him all the while; now anything might happen! She was ready—she had been ready always, waiting for him to speak. If he had not spoken she would have waited for ever; but when the word came she dropped like the peach from the shaken tree. Rosier felt that if he should draw her towards him and hold her to his heart, she would submit without a murmur, she would rest there without a question. It was true that this would be a rash experiment in a yellow Empire *salottino*. She had known it was for her he came; and yet like what a perfect little lady she had carried it off!

"You are very dear to me," he murmured, trying to believe that there was after all such a thing as hospitality.

She looked a moment at her hand, where he had kissed it. "Did you say that papa knows?"

"You told me just now he knows everything."

"I think you must make sure," said Pansy.

"Ah, my dear, when once I am sure of you!" Rosier murmured in her ear, while she turned back to the other rooms with a little air of consistency which seemed to imply that their appeal should be immediate.

The other rooms meanwhile had become conscious of the arrival of Madame Merle, who, wherever she went, produced an impression when she entered. How she did it the most attentive spectator could not have told you; for she neither spoke loud, nor laughed profusely, nor moved rapidly, nor dressed with splendour, nor appealed in any appreciable manner to the audience. Large, fair, smiling, serene, there was something in her very tranquillity that diffused itself, and

when people looked round it was because of a sudden quiet. On this occasion she had done the quietest thing she could do; after embracing Mrs. Osmond, which was more striking, she had sat down on a small sofa to commune with the master of the house. There was a brief exchange of commonplaces between these two—they always paid, in public, a certain formal tribute to the commonplace—and then Madame Merle, whose eyes had been wandering, asked if little Mr. Rosier had come this evening.

"He came nearly an hour ago—but he has disappeared," Osmond said.

"And where is Pansy?"

"In the other room. There are several people there."

"He is probably among them," said Madame Merle.

"Do you wish to see him?" Osmond asked, in a provokingly pointless tone.

Madame Merle looked at him a moment; she knew his tones, to the eighth of a note. "Yes, I should like to say to him that I have told you what he wants, and that it interests you but feebly."

"Don't tell him that, he will try to interest me more—which is exactly what I don't want. Tell him I hate his proposal."

"But you don't hate it."

"It doesn't signify: I don't love it. I let him see that, myself, this evening; I was rude to him on purpose. That sort of thing is a great bore. There is no hurry."

"I will tell him that you will take time and think it over."

"No, don't do that. He will hang on."

"If I discourage him he will do the same."

"Yes, but in the one case he will try and talk and explain; which would be exceedingly tiresome. In the other he will probably hold his tongue and go in for some deeper game. That will leave me quiet. I hate talking with a donkey."

"Is that what you call poor Mr. Rosier?"

"Oh, he's enervating, with his eternal majolica."

Madame Merle dropped her eyes, with a faint smile. "He's a gentleman, he has a charming temper; and, after all, an income of forty thousand francs——"

"It's misery—genteel misery," Osmond broke in. "It's not what I have dreamed of for Pansy."

"Very good, then. He has promised me not to speak to her."

"Do you believe him?" Osmond asked, absent-mindedly.

"Perfectly. Pansy has thought a great deal about him; but I don't suppose you think that matters."

"I don't think it matters at all; but neither do I believe she has thought about him."

"That opinion is more convenient," said Madame Merle, quietly.

"Has she told you that she is in love with him?"

"For what do you take her? And for what do you take me?" Madame Merle added in a moment.

Osmond had raised his foot and was resting his slim ankle on the other knee; he clasped his ankle in his hand, familiarly, and gazed a while before him. "This kind of thing doesn't find me unprepared. It's what I educated her for. It was all for this—that when such a case should come up she should do what I prefer."

"I am not afraid that she will not do it."

"Well then, where is the hitch?"

"I don't see any. But all the same, I recommend you not to get rid of Mr. Rosier. Keep him on hand, he may be useful."

"I can't keep him. Do it yourself."

"Very good; I will put him into a corner and allow him so much a day." Madame Merle had, for the most part, while they talked, been glancing about her; it was her habit, in this situation, just as it was her habit to interpose a good many blank-looking pauses. A long pause followed the last words I have quoted; and before it was broken again, she saw Pansy come out of the adjoining room, followed by Edward Rosier. Pansy advanced a few steps and then stopped and stood looking at Madame Merle and at her father.

"He has spoken to her," Madame Merle said, simply, to Osmond.

Her companion never turned his head. "So much for your belief in his promises. He ought to be horsewhipped."

"He intends to confess, poor little man!"

Osmond got up; he had now taken a sharp look at his daughter. "It doesn't matter," he murmured, turning away.

Pansy after a moment came up to Madame Merle with her little manner of unfamiliar politeness. This lady's reception of her was not more intimate; she simply, as she rose from the sofa, gave her a friendly smile.

"You are very late," said the young girl, gently.

"My dear child, I am never later than I intend to be."

Madame Merle had not got up to be gracious to Pansy; she moved towards Edward Rosier. He came to meet her, and, very quickly, as if to get it off his mind—"I have spoken to her!" he whispered.

"I know it, Mr. Rosier."

"Did she tell you?"

"Yes, she told me. Behave properly for the rest of the evening, and come and see me to-morrow at a quarter past five."

She was severe, and in the manner in which she turned her back to him there was a degree of contempt which caused him to mutter a decent imprecation.

He had no intention of speaking to Osmond; it was neither the time nor the place. But he instinctively wandered towards Isabel, who sat talking with an old lady. He sat down on the other side of her; the old lady was an Italian, and Rosier took for granted that she understood no English.

"You said just now you wouldn't help me," he began, to Mrs. Osmond. "Perhaps you will feel differently when you know—when you know——"

He hesitated a little.

"When I know what?" Isabel asked, gently.

"That she is all right."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Well, that we have come to an understanding."

"She is all wrong," said Isabel. "It won't do."

Poor Rosier gazed at her half-pleadingly, half-angrily; a sudden flush testified to his sense of injury.

"I have never been treated so," he said. "What is there against me, after all? That is not the way I am usually considered. I could have married twenty times."

"It's a pity you didn't. I don't mean twenty times, but once, comfortably," Isabel added, smiling kindly. "You are not rich enough for Pansy."

"She doesn't care a straw for one's money."

"No, but her father does."

"Ah yes, he has proved that!" cried the young man.

Isabel got up, turning away from him, leaving her old lady, without saying anything; and he occupied himself for the next ten minutes in pretending to look at Gilbert Osmond's collection of miniatures, which were neatly arranged on a series of small velvet screens. But he looked without seeing; his cheek burned; he was too full of his sense of injury. It was certain that he had never been treated that way before; he was not used to being thought not good enough. He knew how good he was, and if such a fallacy had not been so pernicious, he could have laughed at it. He looked about again for Pansy, but she had disappeared, and his main desire was now to get out of the house. Before doing so he spoke to Isabel again; it was not agreeable to him to reflect that he had just said a rude thing to her—the only point that would now justify a low view of him.

"I spoke of Mr. Osmond as I shouldn't have done, a while ago," he said. "But you must remember my situation."

"I don't remember what you said," she answered, coldly.

"Ah, you are offended, and now you will never help me."

She was silent an instant, and then, with a change of tone—

"It's not that I won't; I simply can't!" Her manner was almost passionate.

"If you could—just a little," said Rosier, "I would never again speak of your husband save as an angel."

"The inducement is great," said Isabel gravely—inscrutably, as he afterwards, to himself, called it; and she gave him, straight in the eyes, a look which was also inscrutable. It made him remember, somehow, that he had known her as a child; and yet it was keener than he liked, and he took himself off.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

HE went to see Madame Merle on the morrow, and to his surprise she let him off rather easily. But she made him promise that he would stop there until something should have been decided. Mr. Osmond had had higher expectations; it was very true that as he had no intention of giving his daughter a portion, such expectations were open to criticism, or even, if one would, to ridicule. But she would advise Mr. Rosier not to take that tone; if he would possess his soul in patience he might arrive at his felicity.

Mr. Osmond was not favourable to his suit, but it would not be a miracle if he should gradually come round. Pansy would never defy her father, he might depend upon that, so nothing was to be gained by precipitation. Mr. Osmond needed to accustom his mind to an offer of a sort that he had not hitherto entertained, and this result must come of itself—it was useless to try to force it. Rosier remarked that his own situation would be in the mean while the most uncomfortable in the world, and Madame Merle assured him that she felt for him. But, as she justly declared, one couldn't have everything one wanted; she had learned that lesson for herself. There would be no use in his writing to Gilbert Osmond, who had charged her to tell him as much. He wished the matter dropped for a few weeks, and would himself write when he should have anything to communicate which it would please Mr. Rosier to hear.

"He doesn't like your having spoken to Pansy. Ah, he doesn't like it at all," said Madame Merle.

"I am perfectly willing to give him a chance to tell me so!"

"If you do that he will tell you more than you care to hear. Go to the house, for the next month, as little as possible, and leave the rest to me."

"As little as possible? Who is to measure that?"

"Let me measure it. Go on Thursday evenings with the rest of the world; but don't go at all at odd times, and don't fret about Pansy. I will see that she understands everything. She's a calm little nature; she will take it quietly."

Edward Rosier fretted about Pansy a good deal, but he did as he was advised, and waited for another Thursday evening before returning to the Palazzo Roccanera. There had been a party at dinner, so that although he went early the company was already tolerably numerous. Osmond, as usual, was in the first room, near the fire, staring straight at the door, so that, not to be distinctly uncivil, Rosier had to go and speak to him.

"I am glad that you can take a hint," Pansy's father said, slightly closing his keen, conscious eye.

"I take no hints. But I took a message, as I supposed it to be."

"You took it? Where did you take it?"

It seemed to poor Rosier that he was being insulted and he waited a moment, asking himself how much a true lover ought to submit to.

"Madame Merle gave me, as I understood it, a message from you—to the effect that you declined to give me the opportunity I desire—the opportunity to explain my wishes to you."

Rosier flattered himself that he spoke rather sternly.

"I don't see what Madame Merle has to do with it. Why did you apply to Madame Merle?"

"I asked her for an opinion—for nothing more. I did so because she had seemed to me to know you very well."

"She doesn't know me so well as she thinks," said Osmond.

"I am sorry for that, because she has given me some little ground for hope."

Osmond stared into the fire for a moment.

"I set a great price on my daughter."

"You can't set a higher one than I do. Don't I prove it by wishing to marry her?"

"I wish to marry her very well," Osmond went on, with a dry impertinence which, in another mood, poor Rosier would have admired.

"Of course I pretend that she would marry well in marrying me. She couldn't marry a man who loves her more; or whom, I may venture to add, she loves more."

"I am not bound to accept your theories as to whom my daughter loves," Osmond said, looking up with a quick, cold smile.

"I am not theorising. Your daughter has spoken."

"Not to me," Osmond continued, bending forward a little and dropping his eyes to his boot-toes.

"I have her promise, sir!" cried Rosier, with the sharpness of exasperation.

As their voices had been pitched very low before, such a note attracted some attention from the company. Osmond waited till this little movement had subsided, then he said very quickly—

"I think she has no recollection of having given it."

They had been standing with their faces to the fire and after he had uttered these last words Osmond turned round again to the room. Before Rosier had time to rejoin he perceived that a gentleman—a stranger—had just come in, unannounced, according to the Roman custom, and was about to present himself to the master of the house. The latter smiled blandly, but somewhat blankly; the visitor was a handsome man, with a large, fair beard—evidently an Englishman.

"You apparently don't recognise me," he said, with a smile that expressed more than Osmond's.

"Ah yes, now I do; I expected so little to see you."

Rosier departed, and went in direct pursuit of Pansy. He sought her, as usual, in the neighbouring room, but he again encountered Mrs. Osmond in his path. He gave this gracious lady no greeting—he was too righteously indignant; but said to her crudely—

"Your husband is awfully cold-blooded."

She gave the same mystical smile that he had noticed before.

"You can't expect every one to be as hot as yourself."

"I don't pretend to be cold, but I am cool. What has he been doing to his daughter?"

"I have no idea."

"Don't you take any interest?" Rosier demanded, feeling that she too was irritating.

For a moment she answered nothing. Then—

"No!" she said abruptly, and with a quickened light in her eye which directly contradicted the word.

"Excuse me if I don't believe that. Where is Miss Osmond?"

"In the corner, making tea. Please leave her there."

Rosier instantly discovered the young girl, who had been hidden by intervening groups. He watched her, but her own attention was entirely given to her occupation.

"What on earth has he done to her?" he asked again imploringly. "He declares to me that she has given me up."

"She has not given you up," Isabel said, in a low tone, without looking at him.

"Ah, thank you for that! Now I will leave her alone as long as you think proper!"

He had hardly spoken when he saw her change colour, and became aware that Osmond was coming towards her, accompanied by the gentleman who had just entered. He thought the latter, in spite of the advantage of good looks and evident social experience, was a little embarrassed.

"Isabel," said Osmond, "I bring you an old friend."

Mrs. Osmond's face, though it wore a smile, was, like her old friend's not perfectly confident. "I am very happy to see Lord Warburton," she said. Rosier turned away, and now that his talk with her had been interrupted, felt absolved from the little pledge he had just taken. He had a quick impression that Mrs. Osmond would not notice what he did.

To do him justice, Isabel for some time quite ceased to observe him. She had been startled; she hardly knew whether she were glad or not. Lord Warburton, however, now that he was face to face with her, was plainly very well pleased; his frank grey eye expressed a deep, if still somewhat shy, satisfaction. He was larger, stouter than of yore, and he looked older; he stood there very solidly and sensibly.

"I suppose you didn't expect to see me," he said; "I have only just arrived. Literally, I only got here this evening. You see I have lost no time in coming to pay you my respects; I knew you were at home on Thursdays."

"You see the fame of your Thursday has spread to England," Osmond remarked, smiling, to his wife.

"It is very kind of Lord Warburton to come so soon; we are greatly flattered," Isabel said.

"Ah well, it's better than stopping in one of those horrible inns," Osmond went on.

"The hotel seems very good: I think it is the same one where I saw you four years ago. You know it was here in Rome that we first met; it is a long time ago. Do you remember where I bade you good-bye? It was in the Capitol, in the first room."

"I remember that myself," said Osmond; "I was there at the time."

"Yes, I remember that you were there. I was very sorry to leave Rome—so sorry that, somehow or other, it became a melancholy sort of memory, and I have never cared to come back till to-day. But I knew you were living here, and I assure you I have often thought of you. It must be a charming place to live in," said Lord Warburton, brightly, looking about him.

"We should have been glad to see you at any time," Osmond remarked with propriety.

"Thank you very much. I haven't been out of England since then. Till a month ago, I really supposed my travels were over."

"I have heard of you from time to time," said Isabel, who had now completely recovered her self-possession.

"I hope you have heard no harm. My life has been a blank."

"Like the good reigns in history," Osmond suggested. He appeared to think his duties as a host had now terminated, he had performed them very conscientiously. Nothing could have been more adequate, more nicely measured, than his courtesy to his wife's old friend. It was punctilious, it was explicit, it was everything but natural—a deficiency which Lord Warburton, who, himself, had on the whole a good deal of nature, may be supposed to have perceived. "I will leave you and Mrs. Osmond together," he added. "You have reminiscences into which I don't enter."

"I am afraid you lose a good deal!" said Lord Warburton, in a tone which perhaps betrayed overmuch his appreciation

of Osmond's generosity. He stood a moment, looking at Isabel with an eye that gradually became more serious. "I am really very glad to see you."

"It is very pleasant. You are very kind."

"Do you know that you are changed—a little?"

Isabel hesitated a moment.

"Yes—a good deal."

"I don't mean for the worse, of course; and yet how can I say for the better?"

"I think I shall have no scruple in saying that to you," said Isabel, smiling.

"Ah well, for me—it's a long time. It would be a pity that there shouldn't be something to show for it."

They sat down, and Isabel asked him about his sisters, with other inquiries of a somewhat perfunctory kind. He answered her questions as if they interested him, and in a few moments she saw—or believed she saw—that he would prove a more comfortable companion than of yore. Time had breathed upon his heart, and without chilling this organ, had freely ventilated it. Isabel felt her usual esteem for Time rise at a bound. Lord Warburton's manner was certainly that of a contented man who would rather like one to know it.

"There is something I must tell you without more delay," he said. "I have brought Ralph Touchett with me."

"Brought him with you?" Isabel's surprise was great.

"He is at the hotel; he was too tired to come out, and has gone to bed."

"I will go and see him," said Isabel, quickly.

"That is exactly what I hoped you would do. I had an idea that you hadn't seen much of him since your marriage—that in fact your relations were a—a little more formal. That's why I hesitated—like an awkward Englishman."

"I am as fond of Ralph as ever," Isabel answered. "But why has he come to Rome?"

The declaration was very gentle; the question a little sharp.

"Because he is very far gone, Mrs. Osmond."

"Rome, then, is no place for him. I heard from him that he had determined to give up his custom of wintering abroad,

and remain in England, indoors, in what he called an artificial climate."

"Poor fellow, he doesn't succeed with the artificial! I went to see him three weeks ago, at Gardencourt, and found him extremely ill. He has been getting worse every year, and now he has no strength left. He smokes no more cigarettes! He had got up an artificial climate indeed; the house was as hot as Calcutta. Nevertheless, he had suddenly taken it into his head to start for Sicily. I didn't believe in it—neither did the doctors, nor any of his friends. His mother, as I suppose you know, is in America, so there was no one to prevent him. He stuck to his idea that it would be the saving of him to spend the winter at Catania. He said he could take servants and furniture, and make himself comfortable; but in point of fact he hasn't brought anything. I wanted him at least to go by sea, to save fatigue; but he said he hated the sea, and wished to stop at Rome. After that, though I thought it all rubbish, I made up my mind to come with him. I am acting as—what do you call it in America?—as a kind of moderator. Poor Touchett's very moderate now. We left England a fortnight ago, and he has been very bad on the way. He can't keep warm, and the further south we come the more he feels the cold. He has got a rather good man, but I'm afraid he's beyond human help. If you don't mind my saying so, I think it was a most extraordinary time for Mrs. Touchett to choose for going to America."

Isabel had listened eagerly; her face was full of pain and wonder.

"My aunt does that at fixed periods, and she lets nothing turn her aside. When the date comes round she starts; I think she would have started if Ralph had been dying."

"I sometimes think he is dying," Lord Warburton said.

Isabel started up.

"I will go to him now!"

He checked her; he was a little disconcerted at the quick effect of his words.

"I don't mean that I thought so to-night. On the contrary, to-day, in the train, he seemed particularly well; the idea of our reaching Rome—he is very fond of Rome, you know—

gave him strength. An hour ago, when I bade him good-night, he told me that he was very tired, but very happy. Go to him in the morning; that's all I mean. I didn't tell him I was coming here; I didn't think of it till after we separated. Then I remembered that he had told me that you had an evening, and that it was this very Thursday. It occurred to me to come in and tell you that he was here, and let you know that you had perhaps better not wait for him to call. I think he said he had not written to you." There was no need of Isabel's declaring that she would act upon Lord Warburton's information; she looked, as she sat there, like a winged creature held back. "Let alone that I wanted to see you for myself," her visitor added, gallantly.

"I don't understand Ralph's plan; it seems to me very wild," she said. "I was glad to think of him between those thick walls at Gardencourt."

"He was completely alone there; the thick walls were his only company."

"You went to see him; you have been extremely kind.'"

"Oh dear, I had nothing to do," said Lord Warburton.

"We hear, on the contrary, that you are doing great things. Every one speaks of you as a great statesman, and I am perpetually seeing your name in the *Times,* which, by the way, doesn't appear to hold it in reverence. You are apparently as bold a radical as ever."

"I don't feel nearly so bold; you know the world has come round to me. Touchett and I have kept up a sort of Parliamentary debate, all the way from London. I tell him he is the last of the Tories, and he calls me the head of the Communists. So you see there is life in him yet."

Isabel had many questions to ask about Ralph, but she abstained from asking them all. She would see for herself on the morrow. She perceived that after a little Lord Warburton would tire of that subject—that he had a consciousness of other possible topics. She was more and more able to say to herself that he had recovered, and, what is more to the point, she was able to say it without bitterness. He had been for her, of old, such an image of urgency, of insistence, of something to be resisted and reasoned with, that his reappearance at first menaced her with a new trouble. But

she was now reassured; she could see that he only wished to live with her on good terms, that she was to understand that he had forgiven her and was incapable of the bad taste of making pointed allusions. This was not a form of revenge, of course; she had no suspicion that he wished to punish her by an exhibition of disillusionment; she did him the justice to believe that it had simply occurred to him that she would now take a good-natured interest in knowing that he was resigned. It was the resignation of a healthy, manly nature, in which sentimental wounds could never fester. British politics had cured him; she had known they would. She gave an envious thought to the happier lot of men, who are always free to plunge into the healing waters of action. Lord Warburton of course spoke of the past, but he spoke of it without implication; he even went so far as to allude to their former meeting in Rome as a very jolly time. And he told her that he had been immensely interested in hearing of her marriage—that it was a great pleasure to him to make Mr. Osmond's acquaintance—since he could hardly be said to have made it on the other occasion. He had not written to her when she married, but he did not apologise to her for that. The only thing he implied was that they were old friends, intimate friends. It was very much as an intimate friend that he said to her, suddenly, after a short pause which he had occupied in smiling, as he looked about him, like a man to whom everything suggested a cheerful interpretation—

"Well now, I suppose you are very happy, and all that sort of thing?"

Isabel answered with a quick laugh; the tone of his remark struck her almost as the accent of comedy.

"Do you suppose if I were not I would tell you?"

"Well, I don't know. I don't see why not."

"I do, then. Fortunately, however, I am very happy."

"You have got a very good house."

"Yes, it's very pleasant. But that's not my merit—it's my husband's."

"You mean that he has arranged it?"

"Yes, it was nothing when we came."

"He must be very clever."

"He has a genius for upholstery," said Isabel.

"There is a great rage for that sort of thing now. But you must have a taste of your own."

"I enjoy things when they are done; but I have no ideas. I can never propose anything."

"Do you mean that you accept what others propose?"

"Very willingly, for the most part."

"That's a good thing to know. I shall propose you something."

"It will be very kind. I must say, however, that I have in a few small ways a certain initiative. I should like, for instance to introduce you to some of these people."

"Oh, please don't; I like sitting here. Unless it be to that young lady in the blue dress. She has a charming face."

"The one talking to the rosy young man? That's my husband's daughter."

"Lucky man, your husband. What a dear little maid!"

"You must make her acquaintance."

"In a moment, with pleasure. I like looking at her from here." He ceased to look at her, however, very soon; his eyes constantly reverted to Mrs. Osmond. "Do you know I was wrong just now in saying that you had changed?" he presently went on. "You seem to me, after all, very much the same."

"And yet I find it's a great change to be married," said Isabel, with gaiety.

"It affects most people more than it has affected you. You see I haven't gone in for that."

"It rather surprises me."

"You ought to understand it, Mrs. Osmond. But I want to marry," he added, more simply.

"It ought to be very easy," Isabel said, rising, and then blushing a little at the thought that she was hardly the person to say this. It was perhaps because Lord Warburton noticed her blush that he generously forebore to call her attention to the incongruity.

Edward Rosier meanwhile had seated himself on an ottoman beside Pansy's tea-table. He pretended at first to talk to her about trifles, and she asked him who was the new gentleman conversing with her stepmother.

"He's an English lord," said Rosier. "I don't know more."

"I wonder if he will have some tea. The English are so fond of tea."

"Never mind that; I have something particular to say to you."

"Don't speak so loud, or every one will hear us," said Pansy.

"They won't hear us if you continue to look that way: as if your only thought in life was the wish that the kettle would boil."

"It has just been filled; the servants never know!" the young girl exclaimed, with a little sigh.

"Do you know what your father said to me just now? That you didn't mean what you said a week ago."

"I don't mean everything I say. How can a young girl do that? But I mean what I say to you."

"He told me that you had forgotten me."

"Ah no, I don't forget," said Pansy, showing her pretty teeth in a fixed smile.

"Then everything is just the same?"

"Ah no, it's not just the same. Papa has been very severe."

"What has he done to you?

"He asked me what *you* had done to me, and I told him everything. Then he forbade me to marry you."

"You needn't mind that."

"Oh yes, I must indeed. I can't disobey papa."

"Not for one who loves you as I do, and whom you pretend to love?"

Pansy raised the lid of the tea-pot, gazing into this vessel for a moment; then she dropped six words into its aromatic depths. "I love you just as much."

"What good will that do me?"

"Ah," said Pansy, raising her sweet, vague eyes, "I don't know that."

"You disappoint me," groaned poor Rosier.

Pansy was silent a moment; she handed a tea-cup to a servant.

"Please don't talk any more."

"Is this to be all my satisfaction?"

"Papa said I was not to talk with you."

"Do you sacrifice me like that? Ah, it's too much!"

"I wish you would wait a little," said the young girl, in a voice just distinct enough to betray a quaver.

"Of course I will wait if you will give me hope. But you take my life away."

"I will not give you up—oh, no!" Pansy went on.

"He will try and make you marry some one else."

"I will never do that."

"What then are we to wait for?"

She hesitated a moment.

"I will speak to Mrs. Osmond, and she will help us." It was in this manner that she for the most part designated her stepmother.

"She won't help us much. She is afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"Of your father, I suppose."

Pansy shook her little head.

"She is not afraid of any one! We must have patience."

"Ah, that's an awful word," Rosier groaned; he was deeply disconcerted. Oblivious of the customs of good society, he dropped his head into his hands, and, supporting it with a melancholy grace, sat staring at the carpet. Presently he became aware of a good deal of movement about him, and when he looked up saw Pansy making a curtsey—it was still her little curtsey of the convent—to the English lord whom Mrs. Osmond had presented.

CHAPTER XXXIX

IT probably will not be surprising to the reflective reader that Ralph Touchett should have seen less of his cousin since her marriage than he had done before that event—an event of which he took such a view as could hardly prove a confirmation of intimacy. He had uttered his thought, as we know, and after this he had held his peace, Isabel not having invited him to resume a discussion which marked an era in their relations. That discussion had made a difference—the difference that he feared, rather than the one he hoped. It had not chilled the girl's zeal in carrying out her engagement, but it had come dangerously near to spoiling a friendship. No reference was ever again made between them to Ralph's opinion of Gilbert Osmond; and by surrounding this topic with a sacred silence, they managed to preserve a semblance of reciprocal frankness. But there was a difference, as Ralph often said to himself—there was a difference. She had not forgiven him, she never would forgive him; that was all he had gained. She thought she had forgiven him; she believed she didn't care; and as she was both very generous and very proud, these convictions represented a certain reality. But whether or no the event should justify him, he would virtually have done her a wrong, and the wrong was of the sort that women remember best. As Osmond's wife, she could never again be his friend. If in this character she could enjoy the felicity she expected, she would have nothing but contempt for the man who had attempted, in advance, to undermine a blessing so dear; and if on the other hand his warning should be justified, the vow she had taken that he should never know it, would lay upon her spirit a burden that would make her hate him. Such had been, during the year that followed his cousin's marriage, Ralph's rather dismal prevision of the future; and if his meditations appear morbid, we must remember that he was not in the bloom of health. He consoled

himself as he might by behaving (as he deemed) beautifully, and was present at the ceremony by which Isabel was united to Mr. Osmond, and which was performed in Florence in the month of June. He learned from his mother that Isabel at first had thoughts of celebrating her nuptials in her native land, but that as simplicity was what she chiefly desired to secure, she had finally decided, in spite of Osmond's professed willingness to make a journey of any length, that this characteristic would best be preserved by their being married by the nearest clergyman in the shortest time. The thing was done, therefore, at the little American chapel, on a very hot day, in the presence only of Mrs. Touchett and her son, of Pansy Osmond and the Countess Gemini. That severity in the proceedings of which I just spoke, was in part the result of the absence of two persons who might have been looked for on the occasion, and who would have lent it a certain richness. Madame Merle had been invited, but Madame Merle, who was unable to leave Rome, sent a gracious letter of excuses. Henrietta Stackpole had not been invited, as her departure from America, announced to Isabel by Mr. Goodwood, was in fact frustrated by the duties of her profession; but she had sent a letter, less gracious than Madame Merle's, intimating that had she been able to cross the Atlantic, she would have been present not only as a witness but as a critic. Her return to Europe took place somewhat later, and she effected a meeting with Isabel in the autumn, in Paris, when she indulged—perhaps a trifle too freely—her critical genius. Poor Osmond, who was chiefly the subject of it, protested so sharply that Henrietta was obliged to declare to Isabel that she had taken a step which erected a barrier between them. "It isn't in the least that you have married—it is that you have married *him*," she deemed it her duty to remark; agreeing, it will be seen, much more with Ralph Touchett than she suspected, though she had few of his hesitations and compunctions. Henrietta's second visit to Europe, however, was not made in vain; for just at the moment when Osmond had declared to Isabel that he really must object to that newspaper-woman, and Isabel had answered that it seemed to her he took Henrietta too hard, the good Mr. Bantling ap-

peared upon the scene and proposed that they should take a run down to Spain. Henrietta's letters from Spain proved to be the most picturesque she had yet published, and there was one in especial, dated from the Alhambra, and entitled "Moors and Moonlight," which generally passed for her masterpiece. Isabel was secretly disappointed at her husband's not having been able to judge the poor girl more humorously. She even wondered whether his sense of humour were by chance defective. Of course she herself looked at the matter as a person whose present happiness had nothing to grudge to Henrietta's violated conscience. Osmond thought their alliance a kind of monstrosity; he couldn't imagine what they had in common. For him, Mr. Bantling's fellow-tourist was simply the most vulgar of women, and he also pronounced her the most abandoned. Against this latter clause of the verdict Isabel protested with an ardour which made him wonder afresh at the oddity of some of his wife's tastes. Isabel could explain it only by saying that she liked to know people who were as different as possible from herself. "Why then don't you make the acquaintance of your washerwoman?" Osmond had inquired; to which Isabel answered that she was afraid her washerwoman wouldn't care for her. Now Henrietta cared so much.

Ralph saw nothing of her for the greater part of the two years that followed her marriage; the winter that formed the beginning of her residence in Rome he spent again at San Remo, where he was joined in the spring by his mother, who afterwards went with him to England, to see what they were doing at the bank—an operation she could not induce him to perform. Ralph had taken a lease of his house at San Remo, a small villa, which he occupied still another winter; but late in the month of April of this second year he came down to Rome. It was the first time since her marriage that he had stood face to face with Isabel; his desire to see her again was of the keenest. She had written to him from time to time, but her letters told him nothing that he wanted to know. He had asked his mother what she was making of her life, and his mother had simply answered that she supposed she was making the best of it. Mrs. Touchett had

not the imagination that communes with the unseen, and she now pretended to no intimacy with her niece, whom she rarely encountered. This young woman appeared to be living in a sufficiently honourable way, but Mrs. Touchett still remained of the opinion that her marriage was a shabby affair. It gave her no pleasure to think of Isabel's establishment, which she was sure was a very lame business. From time to time, in Florence, she rubbed against the Countess Gemini, doing her best, always, to minimise the contact; and the Countess reminded her of Osmond, who made her think of Isabel. The Countess was less talked about in these days: but Mrs. Touchett augured no good of that; it only proved how she had been talked about before. There was a more direct suggestion of Isabel in the person of Madame Merle; but Madame Merle's relations with Mrs. Touchett had undergone a perceptible change. Isabel's aunt had told her, without circumlocution, that she had played too ingenious a part; and Madame Merle, who never quarrelled with any one, who appeared to think no one worth it, and who had performed the miracle of living, more or less for several years with Mrs. Touchett, without a symptom of irritation—Madame Merle now took a very high tone, and declared that this was an accusation from which she could not stoop to defend herself. She added, however (without stooping), that her behaviour had been only too simple, that she had believed only what she saw, that she saw that Isabel was not eager to marry, and that Osmond was not eager to please (his repeated visits were nothing; he was boring himself to death on his hill-top, and he came merely for amusement). Isabel had kept her sentiments to herself, and her journey to Greece and Egypt had effectually thrown dust in her companion's eyes. Madame Merle accepted the event—she was unprepared to think of it as a scandal; but that she had played any part in it, double or single, was an imputation against which she proudly protested. It was doubtless in consequence of Mrs. Touchett's attitude and of the injury it offered to habits consecrated by many charming seasons, that Madame Merle, after this, chose to pass many months in England, where her credit was quite unimpaired. Mrs. Touchett had done her a wrong; there are some things that

can't be forgiven. But Madame Merle suffered in silence; there was always something exquisite in her dignity.

Ralph, as I say, had wished to see for himself; but while he was engaged in this pursuit he felt afresh what a fool he had been to put the girl on her guard. He had played the wrong card, and now he had lost the game. He should see nothing, he should learn nothing; for him she would always wear a mask. His true line would have been to profess delight in her marriage, so that later, when, as Ralph phrased it, the bottom should fall out of it, she might have the pleasure of saying to him that he had been a goose. He would gladly have consented to pass for a goose in order to know Isabel's real situation. But now she neither taunted him with his fallacies nor pretended that her own confidence was justified; if she wore a mask, it completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity painted upon it; this was not an expression, Ralph said—it was a representation. She had lost her child; that was a sorrow, but it was a sorrow she scarcely spoke of; there was more to say about it than she could say to Ralph. It belonged to the past, moreover; it had occurred six months before, and she had already laid aside the tokens of mourning. She seemed to be leading the life of the world; Ralph heard her spoken of as having a "charming position." He observed that she produced the impression of being peculiarly enviable, that it was supposed, among many people, to be a privilege even to know her. Her house was not open to every one, and she had an evening in the week, to which people were not invited as a matter of course. She lived with a certain magnificence, but you needed to be a member of her circle to perceive it; for there was nothing to gape at, nothing to criticise, nothing even to admire, in the daily proceedings of Mr. and Mrs. Osmond. Ralph, in all this, recognised the hand of the master; for he knew that Isabel had no faculty for producing calculated impressions. She struck him as having a great love of movement, of gaiety, of late hours, of long drives, of fatigue; an eagerness to be entertained, to be interested, even to be bored, to make acquaintances, to see people that were talked about, to explore the neigh-

bourhood of Rome, to enter into relation with certain of the mustiest relics of its old society. In all this there was much less discrimination than in that desire for comprehensiveness of development on which he used to exercise his wit. There was a kind of violence in some of her impulses, of crudity in some of her experiments, which took him by surprise; it seemed to him that she even spoke faster, moved faster, than before her marriage. Certainly she had fallen into exaggerations—she who used to care so much for the pure truth; and whereas of old she had a great delight in good-humoured argument, in intellectual play (she never looked so charming as when in the genial heat of discussion she received a crushing blow full in the face and brushed it away as a feather), she appeared now to think there was nothing worth people's either differing about or agreeing upon. Of old she had been curious, and now she was indifferent, and yet in spite of her indifference her activity was greater than ever. Slender still, but lovelier than before, she had gained no great maturity of aspect; but there was a kind of amplitude and brilliancy in her personal arrangements which gave a touch of insolence to her beauty. Poor human-hearted Isabel, what perversity had bitten her? Her light step drew a mass of drapery behind it; her intelligent head sustained a majesty of ornament. The free, keen girl had become quite another person; what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something. "What did Isabel represent?" Ralph asked himself; and he could only answer by saying that she represented Gilbert Osmond. "Good heavens, what a function!" he exclaimed. He was lost in wonder at the mystery of things. He recognised Osmond, as I say; he recognised him at every turn. He saw how he kept all things within limits; how he adjusted, regulated, animated their manner of life. Osmond was in his element; at last he had material to work with. He always had an eye to effect; and his effects were elaborately studied. They were produced by no vulgar means, but the motive was as vulgar as the art was great. To surround his interior with a sort of invidious sanctity, to tantalise society with a sense of exclusion, to make people believe

his house was different from every other, to impart to the face that he presented to the world a cold originality—this was the ingenious effort of the personage to whom Isabel had attributed a superior morality. "He works with superior material," Ralph said to himself; "but it's rich abundance compared with his former resources." Ralph was a clever man; but Ralph had never—to his own sense—been so clever as when he observed, *in petto,* that under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values, Osmond lived exclusively for the world. Far from being its master, as he pretended to be, he was its very humble servant, and the degree of its attention was his only measure of success. He lived with his eye on it, from morning till night, and the world was so stupid it never suspected the trick. Everything he did was *pose—pose* so deeply calculated that if one were not on the lookout one mistook it for impulse. Ralph had never met a man who lived so much in the land of calculation. His tastes, his studies, his accomplishments, his collections, were all for a purpose. His life on his hill-top at Florence had been a *pose* of years. His solitude, his ennui, his love for his daughter, his good manners, his bad manners, were so many features of a mental image constantly present to him as a model of impertinence and mystification. His ambition was not to please the world, but to please himself by exciting the world's curiosity and then declining to satisfy it. It made him feel great to play the world a trick. The thing he had done in his life most directly to please himself was his marrying Isabel Archer; though in this case indeed the gullible world was in a manner embodied in poor Isabel, who had been mystified to the top of her bent. Ralph of course found a fitness in being consistent; he had embraced a creed, and as he had suffered for it he could not in honour forsake it. I give this little sketch of its articles for what they are worth. It was certain that he was very skilful in fitting the facts to his theory—even the fact that during the month he spent in Rome at this period Gilbert Osmond appeared to regard him not in the least as an enemy. For Mr. Osmond Ralph had not now that importance. It was not that he had the importance of a friend; it was rather that he had none

at all. He was Isabel's cousin, and he was rather unpleasantly ill—it was on this basis that Osmond treated with him. He made the proper inquiries, asked about his health, about Mrs. Touchett, about his opinion of winter climates, whether he was comfortable at his hotel. He addressed him, on the few occasions of their meeting, not a word that was not necessary; but his manner had always the urbanity proper to conscious success in the presence of conscious failure. For all this, Ralph had, towards the end, an inward conviction that Osmond had made it uncomfortable for his wife that she should continue to receive her cousin. He was not jealous—he had not that excuse; no one could be jealous of Ralph. But he made Isabel pay for her old-time kindness, of which so much was still left; and as Ralph had no idea of her paying too much, when his suspicion had become sharp, he took himself off. In doing so he deprived Isabel of a very interesting occupation: she had been constantly wondering what fine principle kept him alive. She decided that it was his love of conversation; his conversation was better than ever. He had given up walking; he was no longer a humorous stroller. He sat all day in a chair—almost any chair would do, and was so dependent on what you would do for him that, had not his talk been highly contemplative, you might have thought he was blind. The reader already knows more about him than Isabel was ever to know, and the reader may therefore be given the key to the mystery. What kept Ralph alive was simply the fact that he had not yet seen enough of his cousin; he was not yet satisfied. There was more to come; he couldn't make up his mind to lose that. He wished to see what she would make of her husband—or what he would make of her. This was only the first act of the drama, and he was determined to sit out the performance. His determination held good; it kept him going some eighteen months more, till the time of his return to Rome with Lord Warburton. It gave him indeed such an air of intending to live indefinitely that Mrs. Touchett, though more accessible to confusions of thought in the matter of this strange, unremunerative—and unremunerated—son of hers

than she had even been before, had, as we have learned, not scrupled to embark for a distant land. If Ralph had been kept alive by suspense, it was with a good deal of the same emotion—the excitement of wondering in what state she should find him—that Isabel ascended to his apartment the day after Lord Warburton had notified her of his arrival in Rome.

She spent an hour with him; it was the first of several visits. Gilbert Osmond called on him punctually, and on Isabel sending a carriage for him Ralph came more than once to the Palazzo Roccanera. A fortnight elapsed, at the end of which Ralph announced to Lord Warburton that he thought after all he wouldn't go to Sicily. The two men had been dining together after a day spent by the latter in ranging about the Campagna. They had left the table, and Warburton, before the chimney, was lighting a cigar, which he instantly removed from his lips.

"Won't go to Sicily? Where then will you go?"

"Well, I guess I won't go anywhere," said Ralph, from the sofa, in a tone of jocosity.

"Do you mean that you will return to England?"

"Oh dear no; I will stay in Rome."

"Rome won't do for you; it's not warm enough."

"It will have to do; I will make it do. See how well I have been."

Lord Warburton looked at him a while, puffing his cigar, as if he were trying to see it.

"You have been better than you were on the journey, certainly. I wonder how you lived through that. But I don't understand your condition. I recommend you to try Sicily."

"I can't try," said poor Ralph; "I can't move further. I can't face that journey. Fancy me between Scylla and Charybdis! I don't want to die on the Sicilian plains—to be snatched away, like Proserpine in the same locality, to the Plutonian shades."

"What the deuce then did you come for?" his lordship inquired.

"Because the idea took me. I see it won't do. It really doesn't matter where I am now. I've exhausted all remedies,

I've swallowed all climates. As I'm here I'll stay; I haven't got any cousins in Sicily."

"Your cousin is certainly an inducement. But what does the doctor say?"

"I haven't asked him, and I don't care a fig. If I die here Mrs. Osmond will bury me. But I shall not die here."

"I hope not." Lord Warburton continued to smoke reflectively. "Well, I must say," he resumed, "for myself I am very glad you don't go to Sicily. I had a horror of that journey."

"Ah, but for you it needn't have mattered. I had no idea of dragging you in my train."

"I certainly didn't mean to let you go alone."

"My dear Warburton, I never expected you to come further than this," Ralph cried.

"I should have gone with you and seen you settled," said Lord Warburton.

"You are a very good fellow. You are very kind."

"Then I should have come back here."

"And then you would have gone to England."

"No, no; I should have stayed."

"Well," said Ralph, "if that's what we are both up to, I don't see where Sicily comes in!"

His companion was silent; he sat staring at the fire. At last, looking up—

"I say, tell me this," he broke out; "did you really mean to go to Sicily when we started?"

"Ah, *vous m'en demandez trop!* Let me put a question first. Did you come with me quite—platonically?"

"I don't know what you mean by that. I wanted to come abroad."

"I suspect we have each been playing our little game."

"Speak for yourself. I made no secret whatever of my wanting to be here a while."

"Yes, I remember you said you wished to see the Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"I have seen him three times; he is very amusing."

"I think you have forgotten what you came for," said Ralph.

"Perhaps I have," his companion answered, rather gravely.

These two gentlemen were children of a race which is not distinguished by the absence of reserve, and they had travelled together from London to Rome without an allusion to matters that were uppermost in the mind of each. There was an old subject that they had once discussed, but it had lost its recognized place in their attention, and even after their arrival in Rome, where many things led back to it, they had kept the same half-diffident, half-confident silence.

"I recommend you to get the doctor's consent, all the same," Lord Warburton went on, abruptly, after an interval.

"The doctor's consent will spoil it; I never have it when I can help it!"

"What does Mrs. Osmond think?"

"I have not told her. She will probably say that Rome is too cold, and even offer to go with me to Catania. She is capable of that."

"In your place I should like it."

"Her husband won't like it."

"Ah well, I can fancy that; though it seems to me you are not bound to mind it. It's his affair."

"I don't want to make any more trouble between them," said Ralph.

"Is there so much already?"

"There's complete preparation for it. Her going off with me would make the explosion. Osmond isn't fond of his wife's cousin."

"Then of course he would make a row. But won't he make a row if you stop here?"

"That's what I want to see. He made one the last time I was in Rome, and then I thought it my duty to go away. Now I think it's my duty to stop and defend her."

"My dear Touchett, your defensive powers—" Lord Warburton began, with a smile. But he saw something in his companion's face that checked him. "Your duty, in these premises, seems to me rather a nice question," he said.

Ralph for a short time answered nothing.

"It is true that my defensive powers are small," he remarked at last; "but as my aggressive ones are still smaller, Osmond may, after all, not think me worth his gunpowder.

At any rate," he added, "there are things I am curious to see."

"You are sacrificing your health to your curiosity then?"

"I am not much interested in my health, and I am deeply interested in Mrs. Osmond."

"So am I. But not as I once was," Lord Warburton added quickly. This was one of the allusions he had not hitherto found occasion to make.

"Does she strike you as very happy?" Ralph inquired, emboldened by this confidence.

"Well, I don't know; I have hardly thought. She told me the other night that she was happy."

"Ah, she told *you,* of course," Ralph exclaimed, smiling.

"I don't know that. It seems to me I was rather the sort of person she might have complained to."

"Complain? She will never complain. She has done it, and she knows it. She will complain to you least of all. She is very careful."

"She needn't be. I don't mean to make love to her again."

"I am delighted to hear it; there can be no doubt at least of *your* duty."

"Ah no," said Lord Warburton, gravely; "none!"

"Permit me to ask," Ralph went on, "whether it is to bring out the fact that you don't mean to make love to her that you are so very civil to the little girl?"

Lord Warburton gave a slight start; he got up and stood before the fire, blushing a little.

"Does that strike you as very ridiculous?"

"Ridiculous? Not in the least, if you really like her."

"I think her a delightful little person. I don't know when a girl of that age has pleased me more."

"She's a charming creature. Ah, she at least is genuine."

"Of course there's the difference in our ages—more than twenty years."

"My dear Warburton," said Ralph, "are you serious?"

"Perfectly serious—as far as I've got."

"I am very glad. And, heaven help us," cried Ralph, "how tickled Gilbert Osmond will be!"

His companion frowned.

"I say, don't spoil it. I shan't marry his daughter to please him."

"He will have the perversity to be pleased all the same."

"He's not so fond of me as that," said his lordship.

"As that? My dear Warburton, the drawback of your position is that people needn't be fond of you at all to wish to be connected with you. Now, with me in such a case, I should have the happy confidence that they loved me."

Lord Warburton seemed scarcely to be in the mood for doing justice to general axioms; he was thinking of a special case.

"Do you think she'll be pleased?"

"The girl herself? Delighted, surely."

"No, no; I mean Mrs. Osmond."

Ralph looked at him a moment.

"My dear fellow, what has she to do with it?"

"Whatever she chooses. She is very fond of the girl."

"Very true—very true." And Ralph slowly got up. "It's an interesting question—how far her fondness for the girl will carry her." He stood there a moment with his hands in his pockets, with a rather sombre eye. "I hope, you know, that you are very—very sure— The deuce!" he broke off, "I don't know how to say it."

"Yes, you do; you know how to say everything."

"Well, it's awkward. I hope you are sure that among Miss Osmond's merits her being a—so near her stepmother isn't a leading one?"

"Good heavens, Touchett!" cried Lord Warburton, angrily, "for what do you take me?"

CHAPTER XL

ISABEL had not seen much of Madame Merle since her marriage, this lady having indulged in frequent absences from Rome. At one time she had spent six months in England; at another she had passed a portion of a winter in Paris. She had made numerous visits to distant friends, and gave countenance to the idea that for the future she should be a less inveterate Roman than in the past. As she had been inveterate in the past only in the sense of constantly having an apartment in one of the sunniest niches of the Pincian—an apartment which often stood empty—this suggested a prospect of almost constant absence; a danger which Isabel at one period had been much inclined to deplore. Familiarity had modified in some degree her first impression of Madame Merle, but it had not essentially altered it; there was still a kind of wonder of admiration in it. Madame Merle was armed at all points; it was a pleasure to see a person so completely equipped for the social battle. She carried her flag discreetly, but her weapons were polished steel, and she used them with a skill which struck Isabel as more and more that of a veteran. She was never weary, never overcome with disgust; she never appeared to need rest or consolation. She had her own ideas; she had of old exposed a great many of them to Isabel, who knew also that under an appearance of extreme self-control her highly-cultivated friend concealed a rich sensibility. But her will was mistress of her life; there was something brilliant in the way she kept going. It was as if she had learned the secret of it—as if the art of life were some clever trick that she had guessed. Isabel, as she herself grew older, became acquainted with revulsions, with disgust; there were days when the world looked black, and she asked herself with some peremptoriness what it was that she was pretending to live for. Her old habit had been to live by enthusiasm, to fall in love with suddenly perceived possibilities, with the idea

of a new attempt. As a young girl, she used to proceed from one little exaltation to the other; there were scarcely any dull places between. But Madame Merle had suppressed enthusiasm; she fell in love now-a-days with nothing; she lived entirely by reason, by wisdom. There were hours when Isabel would have given anything for lessons in this art; if Madame Merle had been near, she would have made an appeal to her. She had become aware more than before of the advantage of being like that—of having made one's self a firm surface, a sort of corselet of silver. But, as I say, it was not till the winter, during which we lately renewed acquaintance with our heroine, that Madame Merle made a continuous stay in Rome. Isabel now saw more of her than she had done since her marriage; but by this time Isabel's needs and inclinations had considerably changed. It was not at present to Madame Merle that she would have applied for instruction; she had lost the desire to know this lady's clever trick. If she had troubles she must keep them to herself, and if life was difficult it would not make it easier to confess herself beaten. Madame Merle was doubtless of great use to herself, and an ornament to any circle; but was she—would she be—of use to others in periods of refined embarrassment? The best way to profit by Madame Merle—this indeed Isabel had always thought—was to imitate her; to be as firm and bright as she. She recognised no embarrassments, and Isabel, considering this fact, determined, for the fiftieth time, to brush aside her own. It seemed to her, too, on the renewal of an intercourse which had virtually been interrupted, that Madame Merle was changed—that she pushed to the extreme a certain rather artificial fear of being indiscreet. Ralph Touchett, we know, had been of the opinion that she was prone to exaggeration, to forcing the note—was apt, in the vulgar phrase, to overdo it. Isabel had never admitted this charge—had never, indeed, quite understood it; Madame Merle's conduct, to her perception, always bore the stamp of good taste, was always "quiet." But in this matter of not wishing to intrude upon the inner life of the Osmond family, it at last occurred to our heroine that she overdid it a little. That, of course, was not the best taste; that was rather violent. She remembered too much that

Isabel was married; that she had now other interests; that though she, Madame Merle, had known Gilbert Osmond and his little Pansy very well, better almost than any one, she was after all not one of them. She was on her guard; she never spoke of their affairs till she was asked, even pressed—as when her opinion was wanted; she had a dread of seeming to meddle. Madame Merle was as candid as we know, and one day she candidly expressed this dread to Isabel.

"I must be on my guard," she said; "I might so easily, without suspecting it, offend you. You would be right to be offended, even if my intention should have been of the purest. I must not forget that I knew your husband long before you did; I must not let that betray me. If you were a silly woman you might be jealous. You are not a silly woman; I know that perfectly. But neither am I; therefore I am determined not to get into trouble. A little harm is very soon done; a mistake is made before one knows it. Of course, if I had wished to make love to your husband, I had ten years to do it in, and nothing to prevent; so it isn't likely I shall begin to-day, when I am so much less attractive than I was. But if I were to annoy you by seeming to take a place that doesn't belong to me, you wouldn't make that reflection; you would simply say that I was forgetting certain differences. I am determined not to forget them. Of course a good friend isn't always thinking of that; one doesn't suspect one's friends of injustice. I don't suspect you, my dear, in the least; but I suspect human nature. Don't think I make myself uncomfortable; I am not always watching myself. I think I sufficiently prove it in talking to you as I do now. All I wish to say is, however, that if you were to be jealous—that is the form it would take—I should be sure to think it was a little my fault. It certainly wouldn't be your husband's."

Isabel had had three years to think over Mrs. Touchett's theory that Madame Merle had made Gilbert Osmond's marriage. We know how she had at first received it. Madame Merle might have made Gilbert Osmond's marriage, but she certainly had not made Isabel Archer's. That was the work of—Isabel scarcely knew what: of nature, of providence, of fortune, of the eternal mystery of things. It was true that

her aunt's complaint had been not so much of Madame Merle's activity as of her duplicity; she had brought about the marriage and then she had denied her guilt. Such guilt would not have been great, to Isabel's mind; she couldn't make a crime of Madame Merle's having been the cause of the most fertile friendship she had ever formed. That occurred to her just before her marriage, after her little discussion with her aunt. If Madame Merle had desired the event, she could only say it had been a very happy thought. With her, moreover, she had been perfectly straightforward; she had never concealed her high opinion of Gilbert Osmond. After her marriage Isabel discovered that her husband took a less comfortable view of the matter; he seldom spoke of Madame Merle, and when his wife alluded to her he usually let the allusion drop.

"Don't you like her?" Isabel had once said to him. "She thinks a great deal of you."

"I will tell you once for all," Osmond had answered. "I liked her once better than I do to-day. I am tired of her, and I am rather ashamed of it. She is so good! I am glad she is not in Italy; it's a sort of rest. Don't talk of her too much; it seems to bring her back. She will come back in plenty of time."

Madame Merle, in fact, had come back before it was too late—too late, I mean, to recover whatever advantage she might have lost. But meantime, if, as I have said, she was somewhat changed, Isabel's feelings were also altered. Her consciousness of the situation was as acute as of old, but it was much less satisfying. A dissatisfied mind, whatever else it lack, is rarely in want of reasons; they bloom as thick as buttercups in June. The fact of Madame Merle having had a hand in Gilbert Osmond's marriage ceased to be one of her titles to consideration; it seemed, after all, that there was not so much to thank her for. As time went on there was less and less; and Isabel once said to herself that perhaps without her these things would not have been. This reflection, however, was instantly stifled; Isabel felt a sort of horror at having made it. "Whatever happens to me let me not be unjust," she said; "let me bear my burdens myself, and not shift them upon others!" This disposition was

tested, eventually, by that ingenious apology for her present conduct which Madame Merle saw fit to make, and of which I have given a sketch; for there was something irritating—there was almost an air of mockery—in her neat discriminations and clear convictions. In Isabel's mind to-day there was nothing clear; there was a confusion of regrets, a complication of fears. She felt helpless as she turned away from her brilliant friend, who had just made the statements I have quoted; Madame Merle knew so little what she was thinking of! Moreover, she herself was so unable to explain. Jealous of her—jealous of her with Gilbert? The idea just then suggested no near reality. She almost wished that jealousy had been possible; it would be a kind of refreshment. Jealousy, after all, was in a sense one of the symptoms of happiness. Madame Merle, however, was wise; it would seem that she knew Isabel better than Isabel knew herself. This young woman had always been fertile in resolutions—many of them of an elevated character; but at no period had they flourished (in the privacy of her heart) more richly than to-day. It is true that they all had a family likeness; they might have been summed up in the determination that if she was to be unhappy it should not be by a fault of her own.

The poor girl had always had a great desire to do her best, and she had not as yet been seriously discouraged. She wished, therefore, to hold fast to justice—not to pay herself by petty revenges. To associate Madame Merle with her disappointment would be a petty revenge—especially as the pleasure she might derive from it would be perfectly insincere. It might feed her sense of bitterness, but it would not loosen her bonds. It was impossible to pretend that she had not acted with her eyes open; if ever a girl was a free agent, she had been. A girl in love was doubtless not a free agent; but the sole source of her mistake had been within herself. There had been no plot, no snare; she had looked, and considered, and chosen. When a woman had made such a mistake there was only one way to repair it—to accept it. One folly was enough, especially when it was to last for ever; a second one would not much set it off. In this vow of reticence there was a certain nobleness which

kept Isabel going; but Madame Merle had been right, for all that, in taking her precautions.

One day, about a month after Ralph Touchett's arrival in Rome, Isabel came back from a walk with Pansy. It was not only a part of her general determination to be just that she was at present very thankful for Pansy. It was a part of her tenderness for things that were pure and weak.

Pansy was dear to her, and there was nothing in her life so much as it should be as the young girl's attachment and the pleasantness of feeling it. It was like a soft presence—like a small hand in her own; on Pansy's part it was more than an affection—it was a kind of faith. On her own side her sense of Pansy's dependence was more than a pleasure; it operated as a command, as a definite reason when motives threatened to fail her. She had said to herself that we must take our duty where we find it, and that we must look for it as much as possible. Pansy's sympathy was a kind of admonition; it seemed to say that here was an opportunity. An opportunity for what, Isabel could hardly have said; in general, to be more for the child than the child was able to be for herself. Isabel could have smiled, in these days, to remember that her little companion had once been ambiguous; for she now perceived that Pansy's ambiguities were simply her own grossness of vision. She had been unable to believe that any one could care so much—so extraordinarily much—to please. But since then she had seen this delicate faculty in operation, and she knew what to think of it. It was the whole creature—it was a sort of genius. Pansy had no pride to interfere with it, and though she was constantly extending her conquests she took no credit for them. The two were constantly together; Mrs. Osmond was rarely seen without her step-daughter. Isabel liked her company; it had the effect of one's carrying a nosegay composed all of the same flower. And then not to neglect Pansy—not under any provocation to neglect her; this she had made an article of religion. The young girl had every appearance of being happier in Isabel's society than in that of any one save her father, whom she admired with an intensity justified by

the fact that, as paternity was an exquisite pleasure to Gilbert Osmond, he had always been elaborately soft. Isabel knew that Pansy liked immensely to be with her and studied the means of pleasing her. She had decided that the best way of pleasing her was negative, and consisted in not giving her trouble—a conviction which certainly could not have had any reference to trouble already existing. She was therefore ingeniously passive and almost imaginatively docile; she was careful even to moderate the eagerness with which she assented to Isabel's propositions, and which might have implied that she thought otherwise. She never interrupted, never asked social questions, and though she delighted in approbation, to the point of turning pale when it came to her, never held out her hand for it. She only looked toward it wistfully—an attitude which, as she grew older, made her eyes the prettiest in the world. When during the second winter at the Palazzo Roccanera, she began to go to parties, to dances, she always, at a reasonable hour, lest Mrs. Osmond should be tired, was the first to propose departure. Isabel appreciated the sacrifice of the late dances, for she knew that Pansy had a passionate pleasure in this exercise, taking her steps to the music like a conscientious fairy. Society, moreover, had no drawbacks for her; she liked even the tiresome parts—the heat of ball-rooms, the dulness of dinners, the crush at the door, the awkward waiting for the carriage. During the day, in this vehicle, beside Isabel, she sat in a little fixed appreciative posture, bending forward and faintly smiling, as if she had been taken to drive for the first time.

On the day I speak of they had been driven out of one of the gates of the city, and at the end of half-an-hour had left the carriage to await them by the roadside, while they walked away over the short grass of the Campagna, which even in the winter months is sprinkled with delicate flowers. This was almost a daily habit with Isabel, who was fond of a walk, and stepped quickly, though not so quickly as when she first came to Europe. It was not the form of exercise that Pansy loved best, but she liked it, because she liked everything; and she moved with a shorter undulation beside her stepmother, who afterwards, on their

return to Rome, paid a tribute to Pansy's preferences by making the circuit of the Pincian or the Villa Borghese. Pansy had gathered a handful of flowers in a sunny hollow, far from the walls of Rome, and on reaching the Palazzo Roccanera she went straight to her room, to put them into water.

Isabel passed into the drawing-room, the one she herself usually occupied, the second in order from the large ante-chamber which was entered from the staircase, and in which even Gilbert Osmond's rich devices had not been able to correct a look of rather grand nudity. Just beyond the threshold of the drawing-room she stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression. The impression had, in strictness, nothing unprecedented; but she felt it as something new, and the soundlessness of her step gave her time to take in the scene before she interrupted it. Madame Merle sat there in her bonnet, and Gilbert Osmond was talking to her; for a minute they were unaware that she had come in. Isabel had often seen that before, certainly; but what she had not seen, or at least had not noticed—was that their dialogue had for the moment converted itself into a sort of familiar silence, from which she instantly perceived that her entrance would startle them. Madame Merle was standing on the rug, a little way from the fire; Osmond was in a deep chair, leaning back and looking at her. Her head was erect, as usual, but her eyes were bent upon his. What struck Isabel first was that he was sitting while Madame Merle stood; there was an anomaly in this that arrested her. Then she perceived that they had arrived at a desultory pause in their exchange of ideas, and were musing, face to face, with the freedom of old friends who sometimes exchange ideas without uttering them. There was nothing shocking in this; they were old friends in fact. But the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light. Their relative position, their absorbed mutual gaze, struck her as something detected. But it was all over by the time she had fairly seen it. Madame Merle had seen her, and had welcomed her without moving; Gilbert Osmond, on the other hand, had

instantly jumped up. He presently murmured something about wanting a walk, and after having asked Madame Merle to excuse him, he left the room.

"I came to see you, thinking you would have come in; and as you had not, I waited for you," Madame Merle said.

"Didn't he ask you to sit down?" asked Isabel, smiling.

Madame Merle looked about her.

"Ah, it's very true; I was going away."

"You must stay now."

"Certainly. I came for a reason; I have something on my mind."

"I have told you that before," Isabel said—"that it takes something extraordinary to bring you to this house."

"And you know what I have told you; that whether I come or whether I stay away, I have always the same motive—the affection I bear you."

"Yes, you have told me that."

"You look just now as if you didn't believe me," said Madame Merle.

"Ah," Isabel answered, "the profundity of your motives, that is the last thing I doubt!"

"You doubt sooner of the sincerity of my words."

Isabel shook her head gravely. "I know you have always been kind to me."

"As often as you would let me. You don't always take it; then one has to let you alone. It's not to do you a kindness, however, that I have come to-day; it's quite another affair. I have come to get rid of a trouble of my own—to make it over to you. I have been talking to your husband about it."

"I am surprised at that; he doesn't like troubles."

"Especially other people's; I know that. But neither do you, I suppose. At any rate, whether you do or not, you must help me. It's about poor Mr. Rosier."

"Ah," said Isabel, reflectively, "it's his trouble, then, not yours."

"He has succeeded in saddling me with it. He comes to see me ten times a week, to talk about Pansy."

"Yes, he wants to marry her. I know all about it."

Madame Merle hesitated a moment. "I gathered from your husband that perhaps you didn't."

"How should he know what I know? He has never spoken to me of the matter."

"It is probably because he doesn't know how to speak of it."

"It's nevertheless a sort of question in which he is rarely at fault."

"Yes, because as a general thing he knows perfectly well what to think. To-day he doesn't."

"Haven't you been telling him?" Isabel asked.

Madame Merle gave a bright, voluntary smile. "Do you know you're a little dry?"

"Yes; I can't help it. Mr. Rosier has also talked to me."

"In that there is some reason. You are so near the child."

"Ah," said Isabel, "for all the comfort I have given him! If you think me dry, I wonder what he thinks."

"I believe he thinks you can do more than you have done."

"I can do nothing."

"You can do more at least than I. I don't know what mysterious connection he may have discovered between me and Pansy; but he came to me from the first, as if I held his fortune in my hand. Now he keeps coming back, to spur me up, to know what hope there is, to pour out his feelings."

"He is very much in love," said Isabel.

"Very much—for him."

"Very much for Pansy, you might say as well."

Madame Merle dropped her eyes a moment. "Don't you think she's attractive?"

"She is the dearest little person possible; but she is very limited."

"She ought to be all the easier for Mr. Rosier to love. Mr. Rosier is not unlimited."

"No," said Isabel, "he has about the extent of one's pocket-handkerchief—the small ones, with lace." Her humour had lately turned a good deal to sarcasm, but in a moment she was ashamed of exercising it on so innocent

an object as Pansy's suitor. "He is very kind, very honest," she presently added; "and he is not such a fool as he seems."

"He assures me that she delights in him," said Madame Merle

"I don't know, I have not asked her."

"You have never sounded her a little?"

"It's not my place; it's her father's."

"Ah, you are too literal!" said Madame Merle.

"I must judge for myself."

Madame Merle gave her smile again. "It isn't easy to help you."

"To help me?" said Isabel, very seriously. "What do you mean?"

"It's easy to displease you. Don't you see how wise I am to be careful? I notify you, at any rate, as I notified Osmond, that I wash my hands of the love-affairs of Miss Pansy and Mr. Edward Rosier. *Je n'y peux rien, moi!* I can't talk to Pansy about him. Especially," added Madame Merle, "as I don't think him a paragon of husbands."

Isabel reflected a little; after which, with a smile—"You don't wash your hands, then!" she said. Then she added, in another tone—"You can't—you are too much interested."

Madame Merle slowly rose; she had given Isabel a look as rapid as the intimation that had gleamed before our heroine a few moments before. Only, this time Isabel saw nothing. "Ask him the next time, and you will see."

"I can't ask him; he has ceased to come to the house. Gilbert has let him know that he is not welcome."

"Ah yes," said Madame Merle, "I forgot that, though it's the burden of his lamentation. He says Osmond has insulted him. All the same," she went on, "Osmond doesn't dislike him as much as he thinks." She had got up, as if to close the conversation, but she lingered, looking about her, and had evidently more to say. Isabel perceived this, and even saw the point she had in view; but Isabel also had her own reasons for not opening the way.

"That must have pleased him, if you have told him," she answered, smiling.

"Certainly I have told him; as far as that goes, I have encouraged him. I have preached patience, have said that

his case is not desperate, if he will only hold his tongue and be quiet. Unfortunately he has taken it into his head to be jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Jealous of Lord Warburton, who, he says, is always here."

Isabel, who was tired, had remained sitting; but at this she also rose. "Ah!" she exclaimed simply, moving slowly to the fireplace. Madame Merle observed her as she passed and as she stood a moment before the mantel-glass, pushing into its place a wandering tress of hair.

"Poor Mr. Rosier keeps saying that there is nothing impossible in Lord Warburton falling in love with Pansy," Madame Merle went on.

Isabel was silent a little; she turned away from the glass. "It is true—there is nothing impossible," she rejoined at last, gravely and more gently.

"So I have had to admit to Mr. Rosier. So, too, your husband thinks."

"That I don't know."

"Ask him, and you will see."

"I shall not ask him," said Isabel.

"Excuse me; I forgot that you had pointed that out. Of course," Madame Merle added, "you have had infinitely more observation of Lord Warburton's behaviour than I."

"I see no reason why I shouldn't tell you that he likes my step-daughter very much."

Madame Merle gave one of her quick looks again. "Likes her, you mean—as Mr. Rosier means?"

"I don't know how Mr. Rosier means; but Lord Warburton has let me know that he is charmed with Pansy."

"And you have never told Osmond?" This observation was immediate, precipitate; it almost burst from Madame Merle's lips.

Isabel smiled a little. "I suppose he will know in time; Lord Warburton has a tongue, and knows how to express himself."

Madame Merle instantly became conscious that she had spoken more quickly than usual, and the reflection brought the colour to her cheek. She gave the treacherous impulse

time to subside, and then she said, as if she had been thinking it over a little: "That would be better than marrying poor Mr. Rosier."

"Much better, I think."

"It would be very delightful; it would be a great marriage. It is really very kind of him."

"Very kind of him?"

"To drop his eyes on a simple little girl."

"I don't see that."

"It's very good of you. But after all, Pansy Osmond——"

"After all, Pansy Osmond is the most attractive person he has ever known!" Isabel exclaimed.

Madame Merle stared, and indeed she was justly bewildered. "Ah, a moment ago, I thought you seemed rather to disparage her."

"I said she was limited. And so she is. And so is Lord Warburton."

"So are we all, if you come to that. If it's no more than Pansy deserves, all the better. But if she fixes her affections on Mr. Rosier, I won't admit that she deserves it. That will be too perverse."

"Mr. Rosier's a nuisance!" cried Isabel, abruptly.

"I quite agree with you, and I am delighted to know that I am not expected to feed his flame. For the future, when he calls on me, my door shall be closed to him." And gathering her mantle together, Madame Merle prepared to depart. She was checked, however, on her progress to the door, by an inconsequent request from Isabel.

"All the same, you know, be kind to him."

She lifted her shoulders and eyebrows, and stood looking at her friend. "I don't understand your contradictions! Decidedly, I shall not be kind to him, for it will be a false kindness. I wish to see her married to Lord Warburton."

"You had better wait till he asks her."

"If what you say is true, he will ask her. Especially," said Madame Merle in a moment, "if you make him."

"If I make him?"

"It's quite in your power. You have great influence with him."

Isabel frowned a little. "Where did you learn that?"

"Mrs. Touchett told me. Not you—never!" said Madame Merle, smiling.

"I certainly never told you that."

"You might have done so when we were by way of being confidential with each other. But you really told me very little; I have often thought so since."

Isabel had thought so too, sometimes with a certain satisfaction. But she did not admit it now—perhaps because she did not wish to appear to exult in it. "You seem to have had an excellent informant in my aunt," she simply said.

"She let me know that you had declined an offer of marriage from Lord Warburton, because she was greatly vexed, and was full of the subject. Of course I think you have done better in doing as you did. But if you wouldn't marry Lord Warburton yourself, make him the reparation of helping him to marry some one else."

Isabel listened to this with a face which persisted in not reflecting the bright expressiveness of Madame Merle's. But in a moment she said, reasonably and gently enough, "I should be very glad indeed if, as regards Pansy, it could be arranged." Upon which her companion, who seemed to regard this as a speech of good omen, embraced her more tenderly than might have been expected, and took her departure.

CHAPTER XLI

OSMOND touched on this matter that evening for the first time; coming very late into the drawing-room, where she was sitting alone. They had spent the evening at home, and Pansy had gone to bed; he himself had been sitting since dinner in a small apartment in which he had arranged his books and which he called his study. At ten o'clock Lord Warburton had come in, as he always did when he knew from Isabel that she was to be at home; he was going somewhere else, and he sat for half-an-hour. Isabel, after asking him for news of Ralph, said very little to him, on purpose; she wished him to talk with the young girl. She pretended to read; she even went after a little to the piano; she asked herself whether she might not leave the room. She had come little by little to think well of the idea of Pansy's becoming the wife of the master of beautiful Lockleigh, though at first it had not presented itself in a manner to excite her enthusiasm. Madame Merle, that afternoon, had applied the match to an accumulation of inflammable material. When Isabel was unhappy, she always looked about her—partly from impulse and partly by theory—for some form of exertion. She could never rid herself of the conviction that unhappiness was a state of disease; it was suffering as opposed to action. To act, to do something—it hardly mattered what—would therefore be an escape, perhaps in some degree a remedy. Besides, she wished to convince herself that she had done everything possible to content her husband; she was determined not to be haunted by images of a flat want of zeal. It would please him greatly to see Pansy married to an English nobleman, and justly please him, since this nobleman was such a fine fellow. It seemed to Isabel that if she could make it her duty to bring about such an event, she should play the part of a good wife. She wanted to be that; she wanted to be able to believe, sincerely, that she had been that. Then, such an un-

dertaking had other recommendations. It would occupy her, and she desired occupation. It would even amuse her, and if she could really amuse herself she perhaps might be saved. Lastly, it would be a service to Lord Warburton, who evidently pleased himself greatly with the young girl. It was a little odd that he should—being what he was; but there was no accounting for such impressions. Pansy might captivate any one—any one, at least, but Lord Warburton. Isabel would have thought her too small, too slight, perhaps even too artificial for that. There was always a little of the doll about her, and that was not what Lord Warburton had been looking for. Still, who could say what men looked for? They looked for what they found; they knew what pleased them only when they saw it. No theory was valid in such matters, and nothing was more unaccountable or more natural than anything else. If he had cared for *her* it might seem odd that he cared for Pansy, who was so different; but he had not cared for her so much as he supposed. Or if he had, he had completely got over it, and it was natural that as that affair had failed, he should think that something of quite another sort might succeed. Enthusiasm, as I say, had not come at first to Isabel, but it came to-day and made her feel almost happy. It was astonishing what happiness she could still find in the idea of procuring a pleasure for her husband. It was a pity, however, that Edward Rosier had crossed their path!

At this reflection the light that had suddenly gleamed upon that path lost something of its brightness. Isabel was unfortunately as sure that Pansy thought Mr. Rosier the nicest of all the young men—as sure as if she had held an interview with her on the subject. It was very tiresome that she should be so sure, when she had carefully abstained from informing herself; almost as tiresome as that poor Mr. Rosier should have taken it into his own head. He was certainly very inferior to Lord Warburton. It was not the difference in fortune so much as the difference in the men; the young American was really so very flimsy. He was much more of the type of the useless fine gentleman than the English nobleman. It was true that there was no particular reason why Pansy should marry a statesman; still, if a statesman

admired her, that was his affair, and she would make a very picturesque little peeress.

It may seem to the reader that Isabel had suddenly grown strangely cynical; for she ended by saying to herself that this difficulty could probably be arranged. Somehow, an impediment that was embodied in poor Rosier could not present itself as a dangerous one; there were always means of levelling secondary obstacles. Isabel was perfectly aware that she had not taken the measure of Pansy's tenacity, which might prove to be inconveniently great; but she inclined to think the young girl would not be tenacious, for she had the faculty of assent developed in a very much higher degree than that of resistance. She would cling, yes, she would cling; but it really mattered to her very little what she clung to. Lord Warburton would do as well as Mr. Rosier—especially as she seemed quite to like him. She had expressed this sentiment to Isabel without a single reservation; she said she thought his conversation most interesting—he had told her all about India. His manner to Pansy had been of the happiest; Isabel noticed that for herself, as she also observed that he talked to her not in the least in a patronising way, reminding himself of her youth and simplicity, but quite as if she could understand everything. He was careful only to be kind—he was as kind as he had been to Isabel herself at Gardencourt. A girl might well be touched by that; she remembered how she herself had been touched, and said to herself that if she had been as simple as Pansy, the impression would have been deeper still. She had not been simple when she refused him; that operation had been as complicated, as, later, her acceptance of Osmond. Pansy, however, in spite of *her* simplicity, really did understand, and was glad that Lord Warburton should talk to her, not about her partners and bouquets, but about the state of Italy, the condition of the peasantry, the famous grist-tax, the *pellagra*, his impressions of Roman society. She looked at him as she drew her needle through her tapestry, with sweet attentive eyes, and when she lowered them she gave little quiet oblique glances at his person, his hands, his feet, his clothes, as if she were considering him. Even his person, Isabel might have re-

minded her, was better than Mr. Rosier's. But Isabel contented herself at such moments with wondering where this gentleman was; he came no more at all to the Palazzo Roccanera. It was surprising, as I say, the hold it had taken of her—the idea of assisting her husband to be pleased.

It was surprising for a variety of reasons, which I shall presently touch upon. On the evening I speak of, while Lord Warburton sat there, she had been on the point of taking the great step of going out of the room and leaving her companions alone. I say the great step, because it was in this light that Gilbert Osmond would have regarded it, and Isabel was trying as much as possible to take her husband's view. She succeeded after a fashion, but she did not succeed in coming to the point I mention. After all, she couldn't; something held her and made it impossible. It was not exactly that it would be base, insidious; for women as a general thing practise such manœuvres with a perfectly good conscience, and Isabel had all the qualities of her sex. It was a vague doubt that interposed—a sense that she was not quite sure. So she remained in the drawing-room, and after a while Lord Warburton went off to his party, of which he promised to give Pansy a full account on the morrow. After he had gone, Isabel asked herself whether she had prevented something which would have happened if she had absented herself for a quarter of an hour; and then she exclaimed—always mentally—that when Lord Warburton wished her to go away he would easily find means to let her know it. Pansy said nothing whatever about him after he had gone, and Isabel said nothing, as she had taken a vow of reserve until after he should have declared himself. He was a little longer in coming to this than might seem to accord with the description he had given Isabel of his feelings. Pansy went to bed, and Isabel had to admit that she could not now guess what her step-daughter was thinking of. Her transparent little companion was for the moment rather opaque.

Isabel remained alone, looking at the fire, until, at the end of half-an-hour, her husband came in. He moved about a while in silence, and then sat down, looking at the fire like herself. But Isabel now had transferred her eyes from the

flickering flame in the chimney to Osmond's face, and she watched him while he sat silent. Covert observation had become a habit with her; an instinct, of which it is not an exaggeration to say that it was allied to that of self-defence, had made it habitual. She wished as much as possible to know his thoughts, to know what he would say, beforehand, so that she might prepare her answer. Preparing answers had not been her strong point of old; she had rarely in this respect got further than thinking afterwards of clever things she might have said. But she had learned caution—learned it in a measure from her husband's very countenance. It was the same face she had looked into with eyes equally earnest perhaps, but less penetrating, on the terrace of a Florentine villa; except that Osmond had grown a little stouter since his marriage. He still, however, looked very distinguished.

"Has Lord Warburton been here?" he presently asked.

"Yes, he stayed for half-an-hour."

"Did he see Pansy?"

"Yes; he sat on the sofa beside her."

"Did he talk with her much?"

"He talked almost only to her."

"It seems to me he's attentive. Isn't that what you call it?"

"I don't call it anything," said Isabel; "I have waited for you to give it a name."

"That's a consideration you don't always show," Osmond answered, after a moment.

"I have determined, this time, to try and act as you would like. I have so often failed in that."

Osmond turned his head, slowly, looking at her.

"Are you trying to quarrel with me?"

"No, I am trying to live at peace."

"Nothing is more easy; you know I don't quarrel myself."

"What do you call it when you try to make me angry?" Isabel asked.

"I don't try; if I have done so, it has been the most natural thing in the world. Moreover, I am not in the least trying now."

Isabel smiled. "It doesn't matter. I have determined never to be angry again."

"That's an excellent resolve. Your temper isn't good."

"No—it's not good." She pushed away the book she had been reading, and took up the band of tapestry that Pansy had left on the table.

"That's partly why I have not spoken to you about this business of my daughter's," Osmond said, designating Pansy in the manner that was most frequent with him. "I was afraid I should encounter opposition—that you too would have views on the subject. I have sent little Rosier about his business."

"You were afraid that I would plead for Mr. Rosier? Haven't you noticed that I have never spoken to you of him?"

"I have never given you a chance. We have so little conservation in these days. I know he was an old friend of yours."

"Yes; he's an old friend of mine." Isabel cared little more for him than for the tapestry that she held in her hand; but it was true that he was an old friend, and with her husband she felt a desire not to extenuate such ties. He had a way of expressing contempt for them which fortified her loyalty to them, even when, as in the present case, they were in themselves insignificant. She sometimes felt a sort of passion of tenderness for memories which had no other merit than that they belonged to her unmarried life. "But as regards Pansy," she added in a moment, "I have given him no encouragement."

"That's fortunate," Osmond observed.

"Fortunate for me, I suppose you mean. For him it matters little."

"There is no use talking of him," Osmond said. "As I tell you, I have turned him out."

"Yes; but a lover outside is always a lover. He is sometimes even more of one. Mr. Rosier still has hope."

"He's welcome to the comfort of it! My daughter has only to sit still, to become Lady Warburton."

"Should you like that?" Isabel asked, with a simplicity which was not so affected as it may appear. She was resolved to assume nothing, for Osmond had a way of unexpectedly turning her assumptions against her. The inten-

sity with which he would like his daughter to become Lady Warburton had been the very basis of her own recent reflections. But that was for herself; she would recognise nothing until Osmond should have put it into words; she would not take for granted with him that he thought Lord Warburton a prize worth an amount of effort that was unusual among the Osmonds. It was Gilbert's constant intimation that, for him, nothing was a prize; that he treated as from equal to equal with the most distinguished people in the world, and that his daughter had only to look about her to pick out a prince. It cost him therefore a lapse from consistency to say explicitly that he yearned for Lord Warburton, that if this nobleman should escape, his equivalent might not be found; and it was another of his customary implications that he was never inconsistent. He would have liked his wife to glide over the point. But strangely enough, now that she was face to face with him, though an hour before she had almost invented a scheme for pleasing him, Isabel was not accommodating, would not glide. And yet she knew exactly the effect on his mind of her question: it would operate as a humiliation. Never mind; he was terribly capable of humiliating her—all the more so that he was also capable of waiting for great opportunities and of showing, sometimes, an almost unaccountable indifference to small ones. Isabel perhaps took a small opportunity because she would not have availed herself of a great one.

Osmond at present acquitted himself very honourably. "I should like it extremely; it would be a great marriage. And then Lord Warburton has another advantage; he is an old friend of yours. It would be pleasant for him to come into the family. It is very singular that Pansy's admirers should all be your old friends."

"It is natural that they should come to see me. In coming to see me, they see Pansy. Seeing her, it is natural that they should fall in love with her."

"So I think. But you are not bound to do so."

"If she should marry Lord Warburton, I should be very glad," Isabel went on, frankly. "He's an excellent man. You say, however, that she has only to sit still. Perhaps she won't sit still; if she loses Mr. Rosier she may jump up!"

Osmond appeared to give no heed to this; he sat gazing at the fire. "Pansy would like to be a great lady," he remarked in a moment, with a certain tenderness of tone. "She wishes, above all, to please," he added.

"To please Mr. Rosier, perhaps."

"No, to please me."

"Me too a little, I think," said Isabel.

"Yes, she has a great opinion of you. But she will do what I like."

"If you are sure of that, it's very well," Isabel said.

"Meantime," said Osmond, "I should like our distinguished visitor to speak."

"He has spoken—to me. He has told me that it would be a great pleasure to him to believe she could care for him."

Osmond turned his head quickly; but at first he said nothing. Then—"Why didn't you tell me that?" he asked, quickly.

"There was no opportunity. You know how we live. I have taken the first chance that has offered."

"Did you speak to him of Rosier?"

"Oh yes, a little."

"That was hardly necessary."

"I thought it best he should know, so that, so that——" And Isabel paused.

"So that what?"

"So that he should act accordingly."

"So that he should back out, do you mean?"

"No, so that he should advance while there is yet time."

"That is not the effect it seems to have had."

"You should have patience," said Isabel. "You know Englishmen are shy."

"This one is not. He was not when he made love to you."

She had been afraid Osmond would speak of that; it was disagreeable to her. "I beg your pardon; he was extremely so," she said simply.

He answered nothing for some time; he took up a book and turned over the pages, while Isabel sat silent, occupying herself with Pansy's tapestry. "You must have a great deal of influence with him," Osmond went on at last. "The moment you really wish it, you can bring him to the point."

This was more disagreeable still; but Isabel felt it to be natural that her husband should say it, and it was after all something very much of the same sort that she had said to herself. "Why should I have influence?" she asked. "What have I ever done to put him under an obligation to me?"

"You refused to marry him," said Osmond, with his eyes on his book.

"I must not presume too much on that," Isabel answered, gently.

He threw down the book presently, and got up, standing before the fire with his hands behind him. "Well," he said, "I hold that it lies in your hands. I shall leave it there. With a little good-will you may manage it. Think that over and remember that I count upon you."

He waited a little, to give her time to answer; but she answered nothing, and he presently strolled out of the room.

CHAPTER XLII

SHE answered nothing, because his words had put the situation before her, and she was absorbed in looking at it. There was something in them that suddenly opened the door to agitation, so that she was afraid to trust herself to speak. After Osmond had gone, she leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes; and for a long time, far into the night, and still further she sat in the silent drawing-room, given up to her meditation. A servant came in to attend to the fire, and she bade him bring fresh candles and then go to bed. Osmond had told her to think of what he had said; and she did so indeed, and of many other things. The suggestion, from another, that she had a peculiar influence on Lord Warburton, had given her the start that accompanies unexpected recognition. Was it true that there was something still between them that might be a handle to make him declare himself to Pansy—a susceptibility, on his part, to approval, a desire to do what would please her? Isabel had hitherto not asked herself the question, because she had not been forced; but now that it was directly presented to her, she saw the answer, and the answer frightened her. Yes, there was something—something on Lord Warburton's part. When he first came to Rome she believed that the link which united them had completely snapped; but little by little she had been reminded that it still had a palpable existence. It was as thin as a hair, but there were moments when she seemed to hear it vibrate. For herself, nothing was changed; what she once thought of Lord Warburton she still thought; it was needless that feeling should change; on the contrary, it seemed to her a better feeling than ever. But he? had he still the idea that she might be more to him than other women? Had he the wish to profit by the memory of the few moments of intimacy through which they had once passed? Isabel knew that she had read some of the signs of such a disposition. But what were his hopes,

his pretensions, and in what strange way were they mingled with his evidently very sincere appreciation of poor Pansy? Was he in love with Gilbert Osmond's wife, and if so, what comfort did he expect to derive from it? If he was in love with Pansy, he was not in love with her stepmother; and if he was in love with her stepmother, he was not in love with Pansy. Was she to cultivate the advantage she possessed, in order to make him commit himself to Pansy, knowing that he would do so for her sake, and not for the young girl's —was this the service her husband had asked of her? This at any rate was the duty with which Isabel found herself confronted from the moment that she admitted to herself that Lord Warburton had still an uneradicated predilection for her society. It was not an agreeable task; it was, in fact, a repulsive one. She asked herself with dismay whether Lord Warburton were pretending to be in love with Pansy in order to cultivate another satisfaction. Of this refinement of duplicity she presently acquitted him; she preferred to believe that he was in good faith. But if his admiration for Pansy was a delusion, this was scarcely better than its being an affectation. Isabel wandered among these ugly possibilities until she completely lost her way; some of them, as she suddenly encountered them, seemed ugly enough. Then she broke out of the labyrinth, rubbing her eyes, and declared that her imagination surely did her little honour, and that her husband's did him even less. Lord Warburton was as disinterested as he need be, and she was no more to him than she need wish. She would rest upon this until the contrary should be proved; proved more effectually than by a cynical intimation of Osmond's.

Such a resolution, however, brought her this evening but little peace, for her soul was haunted with terrors which crowded to the foreground of thought as quickly as a place was made for them. What had suddenly set them into livelier motion she hardly knew, unless it were the strange impression she had received in the afternoon of her husband and Madame Merle being in more direct communication than she suspected. This impression came back to her from time to time, and now she wondered that it had never come before. Besides this, her short interview with Osmond, half-an-

hour before, was a striking example of his faculty for making everything wither that he touched, spoiling everything for her that he looked at. It was very well to undertake to give him a proof of loyalty; the real fact was that the knowledge of his expecting a thing raised a presumption against it. It was as if he had had the evil eye; as if his presence were a blight and his favour a misfortune. Was the fault in himself, or only in the deep mistrust she had conceived for him? This mistrust was the clearest result of their short married life; a gulf had opened between them over which they looked at each other with eyes that were on either side a declaration of the deception suffered. It was a strange opposition, of the like of which she had never dreamed—an opposition in which the vital principle of the one was a thing of contempt to the other. It was not her fault—she had practised no deception; she had only admired and believed. She had taken all the first steps in the purest confidence, and then she had suddenly found the infinite vista of a multiplied life to be a dark, narrow alley, with a dead wall at the end. Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression, where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, and served to deepen the feeling of failure. It was her deep distrust of her husband—this was what darkened the world. That is a sentiment easily indicated, but not so easily explained, and so composite in its character that much time and still more suffering had been needed to bring it to its actual perfection. Suffering, with Isabel, was an active condition; it was not a chill, a stupor, a despair; it was a passion of thought, of speculation, of response to every pressure. She flattered herself, however, that she had kept her failing faith to herself—that no one suspected it but Osmond. Oh, he knew it, and there were times when she thought that he enjoyed it. It had come gradually—it was not till the first year of her marriage had closed that she took the alarm. Then the shadows began to gather; it was as if Osmond deliberately, almost malignantly,

had put the lights out one by one. The dusk at first was vague and thin, and she could still see her way in it. But it steadily increased, and if here and there it had occasionally lifted, there were certain corners of her life that were impenetrably black. These shadows were not an emanation from her own mind; she was very sure of that; she had done her best to be just and temperate, to see only the truth. They were a part of her husband's very presence. They were not his misdeeds, his turpitudes; she accused him of nothing—that is, of but one thing, which was not a crime. She knew of no wrong that he had done; he was not violent, he was not cruel; she simply believed that he hated her. That was all she accused him of, and the miserable part of it was precisely that it was not a crime, for against a crime she might have found redress. He had discovered that she was so different, that she was not what he had believed she would prove to be.

He had thought at first he could change her, and she had done her best to be what he would like. But she was, after all, herself—she couldn't help that; and now there was no use pretending, playing a part, for he knew her and he had made up his mind. She was not afraid of him; she had no apprehension that he would hurt her; for the ill-will he bore her was not of that sort. He would, if possible, never give her a pretext, never put himself in the wrong. Isabel, scanning the future with dry, fixed eyes, saw that he would have the better of her there. She would give him many pretexts, she would often put herself in the wrong. There were times when she almost pitied him; for if she had not deceived him in intention she understood how completely she must have done so in fact. She had effaced herself, when he first knew her; she had made herself small, pretending there was less of her than there really was. It was because she had been under the extraordinary charm that he, on his side, had taken pains to put forth. He was not changed; he had not disguised himself, during the year of his courtship, any more than she. But she had seen only half his nature then, as one saw the disk of the moon when it was partly masked by the shadow of the earth. She saw the full moon now—she saw the whole man. She had kept

still, as it were, so that he should have a free field, and yet in spite of this she had mistaken a part for the whole.

Ah, she had him immensely under her charm! It had not passed away; it was there still; she still knew perfectly what it was that made Osmond delightful when he chose to be. He had wished to be when he made love to her, and as she had wished to be charmed it was not wonderful that he succeeded. He succeeded because he was sincere; it had never occurred to her to deny him that. He admired her—he had told her why; because she was the most imaginative woman he had known. It might very well have been true; for during those months she had imagined a world of things that had no substance. She had a vision of him—she had not read him right. A certain combination of features had touched her, and in them she had seen the most striking of portraits. That he was poor and lonely, and yet that somehow he was noble—that was what interested her and seemed to give her her opportunity. There was an indefinable beauty about him—in his situation, in his mind, in his face. She had felt at the same time that he was helpless and ineffectual, but the feeling had taken the form of a tenderness which was the very flower of respect. He was like a sceptical voyager, strolling on the beach while he waited for the tide, looking seaward yet not putting to sea. It was in all this that she found her occasion. She would launch his boat for him; she would be his providence; it would be a good thing to love him. And she loved him—a good deal for what she found in him, but a good deal also for what she brought him. As she looked back at the passion of those weeks she perceived in it a kind of maternal strain—the happiness of a woman who felt that she was a contributor, that she came with full hands. But for her money, as she saw to-day, she wouldn't have done it. And then her mind wandered off to poor Mr. Touchett, sleeping under English turf, the beneficent author of infinite woe! For this was a fact. At bottom her money had been a burden, had been on her mind, which was filled with the desire to transfer the weight of it to some other conscience. What would lighten her own conscience more effectually than to make it over to the man who had the best taste in the world? Unless she should give

it to a hospital, there was nothing better she could do with it; and there was no charitable institution in which she was as much interested as in Gilbert Osmond. He would use her fortune in a way that would make her think better of it, and rub off a certain grossness which attached to the good luck of an unexpected inheritance. There had been nothing very delicate in inheriting seventy thousand pounds; the delicacy had been all in Mr. Touchett's leaving them to her. But to marry Gilbert Osmond and bring him such a portion—in that there would be delicacy for her as well. There would be less for him—that was true; but that was his affair, and if he loved her he would not object to her being rich. Had he not had the courage to say he was glad she was rich?

Isabel's cheek tingled when she asked herself if she had really married on a factitious theory, in order to do something finely appreciable with her money. But she was able to answer quickly enough that this was only half the story. It was because a certain feeling took possession of her—a sense of the earnestness of his affection and a delight in his personal qualities. He was better than any one else. This supreme conviction had filled her life for months, and enough of it still remained to prove to her that she could not have done otherwise. The finest individual she had ever known was hers; the simple knowledge was a sort of act of devotion. She had not been mistaken about the beauty of his mind; she knew that organ perfectly now. She had lived with it, she had lived in it almost—it appeared to have become her habitation. If she had been captured, it had taken a firm hand to do it; that reflection perhaps had some worth. A mind more ingenious, more subtle, more cultivated, more trained to admirable exercises, she had not encountered; and it was this exquisite instrument that she had now to reckon with. She lost herself in infinite dismay when she thought of the magnitude of *his* deception. It was a wonder, perhaps, in view of this, that he didn't hate her more. She remembered perfectly the first sign he had given of it—it had been like the bell that was to ring up the curtain upon the real drama of their life. He said to her one day that she had too many ideas, and that she must get rid of them. He had told her that already, before their marriage; but then she

had not noticed it; it came back to her only afterwards. This time she might well notice it, because he had really meant it. The words were nothing, superficially; but when in the light of deepening experience she looked into them, they appeared portentous. He really meant it—he would have liked her to have nothing of her own but her pretty appearance. She knew she had too many ideas; she had more even than he supposed, many more than she had expressed to him when he asked her to marry him. Yes, she *had* been hypocritical; she liked him so much. She had too many ideas for herself; but that was just what one married for, to share them with some one else. One couldn't pluck them up by the roots, though of course one might suppress them, be careful not to utter them. It was not that, however, his objecting to her opinions; that was nothing. She had no opinions—none that she would not have been eager to sacrifice in the satisfaction of feeling herself loved for it. What he meant was the whole thing—her character, the way she felt, the way she judged. This was what she had kept in reserve; this was what he had not known until he found himself—with the door closed behind, as it were—set down face to face with it. She had a certain way of looking at life which he took as a personal offence. Heaven knew that, now at least, it was a very humble, accommodating way! The strange thing was that she should not have suspected from the first that his own was so different. She had thought it so large, so enlightened, so perfectly that of an honest man and a gentleman. Had not he assured her that he had no superstitions, no dull limitations, no prejudices that had lost their freshness? Hadn't he all the appearance of a man living in the open air of the world, indifferent to small considerations, caring only for truth and knowledge, and believing that two intelligent people ought to look for them together, and whether they found them or not, to find at least some happiness in the search? He had told her that he loved the conventional; but there was a sense in which this seemed a noble declaration. In that sense, the love of harmony, and order, and decency, and all the stately offices of life, she went with him freely, and his warning had contained nothing ominous. But when, as the months elapsed, she followed him further and he led her into

the mansion of his own habitation, then, then she had seen where she really was. She could live it over again, the incredulous terror with which she had taken the measure of her dwelling. Between those four walls she had lived ever since; they were to surround her for the rest of her life. It was the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air; Osmond's beautiful mind, indeed, seemed to peep down from a small high window and mock at her. Of course it was not physical suffering; for physical suffering there might have been a remedy. She could come and go; she had her liberty; her husband was perfectly polite. He took himself so seriously; it was something appalling. Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good-nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers. She had taken him seriously, but she had not taken him so seriously as that. How could she—especially when she knew him better? She was to think of him as he thought of himself—as the first gentleman in Europe. So it was that she had thought of him at first, and that indeed was the reason she had married him. But when she began to see what it implied, she drew back; there was more in the bond than she had meant to put her name to. It implied a sovereign contempt for every one but some three or four very exalted people whom he envied, and for everything in the world but half-a-dozen ideas of his own. That was very well; she would have gone with him even there, a long distance; for he pointed out to her so much of the baseness and shabbiness of life, opened her eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of mankind, that she had been properly impressed with the infinite vulgarity of things, and of the virtue of keeping one's self unspotted by it. But this base, ignoble world, it appeared, was after all what one was to live for; one was to keep it for ever in one's eye, in order, not to enlighten, or convert, or redeem it, but to extract from it some recognition of one's own superiority. On the one hand it was despicable, but on the other it afforded a standard. Osmond had talked to Isabel about his renunciation, his indifference, the ease with which he dispensed with the usual aids to success; and all this had seemed to her ad-

mirable. She had thought it a noble indifference, an exquisite independence. But indifference was really the last of his qualities; she had never seen any one who thought so much of others. For herself, the world had always interested her, and the study of her fellow-creatures was her constant passion. She would have been willing, however, to renounce all her curiosities and sympathies for the sake of a personal life, if the person concerned had only been able to make her believe it was a gain! This, at least, was her present conviction; and the thing certainly would have been easier than to care for society as Osmond cared for it.

He was unable to live without it, and she saw that he had never really done so; he had looked at it out of his window even when he appeared to be most detached from it. He had his ideal, just as she had tried to have hers; only it was strange that people should seek for justice in such different quarters. His ideal was a conception of high prosperity and propriety, of the aristocratic life, which she now saw that Osmond deemed himself always, in essence at least, to have led. He had never lapsed from it for an hour; he would never have recovered from the shame of doing so. That again was very well; here too she would have agreed; but they attached such different ideas, such different associations and desires, to the same formulas. Her notion of the aristocratic life was simply the union of great knowledge with great liberty; the knowledge would give one a sense of duty, and the liberty a sense of enjoyment. But for Osmond it was altogether a thing of forms, a conscious, calculated attitude. He was fond of the old, the consecrated, and transmitted; so was she, but she pretended to do what she chose with it. He had an immense esteem for tradition; he had told her once that the best thing in the world was to have it, but that if one was so unfortunate as not to have it, one must immediately proceed to make it. She knew that he meant by this that she hadn't it, but that he was better off; though where he had got his traditions she never learned. He had a very large collection of them, however; that was very certain; after a little she began to see. The great thing was to act in accordance with them; the great thing not only for him but for her. Isabel had an undefined conviction that,

to serve for another person than their proprietor, traditions must be of a thoroughly superior kind; but she nevertheless assented to this intimation that she too must march to the stately music that floated down from unknown periods in her husband's past; she who of old had been so free of step, so desultory, so devious, so much the reverse of processional. There were certain things they must do, a certain posture they must take, certain people they must know and not know. When Isabel saw this rigid system closing about her, draped though it was in pictured tapestries, that sense of darkness and suffocation of which I have spoken took possession of her; she seemed to be shut up with an odour of mould and decay. She had resisted, of course; at first very humorously, ironically, tenderly; then as the situation grew more serious, eagerly, passionately, pleadingly. She had pleaded the cause of freedom, of doing as they chose, of not caring for the aspect and denomination of their life—the cause of other instincts and longings, of quite another ideal. Then it was that her husband's personality, touched as it never had been, stepped forth and stood erect. The things that she had said were answered only by his scorn, and she could see that he was ineffably ashamed of her. What did he think of her—that she was base, vulgar, ignoble? He at least knew now that she had no traditions! It had not been in his prevision of things that she should reveal such flatness; her sentiments were worthy of a radical newspaper or of a Unitarian preacher. The real offence, as she ultimately perceived, was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his—attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay. It would be a pretty piece of property for a proprietor already far-reaching. He didn't wish her to be stupid. On the contrary, it was because she was clever that she had pleased him. But he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour, and so far from desiring her mind to be a blank, he had flattered himself that it would be richly receptive. He had expected his wife to feel with him and for him, to enter into his opinions, his ambitions, his preferences; and Isabel was obliged to confess that his was no

very unwarrantable demand on the part of a husband. But there were certain things she could never take in. To begin with, they were hideously unclean. She was not a daughter of the Puritans, but for all that she believed in such a thing as purity. It would appear that Osmond didn't; some of his traditions made her push back her skirts. Did all women have lovers? Did they all lie, and even the best have their price? Were there only three or four that didn't deceive their husbands? When Isabel heard such things she felt a greater scorn for them than for the gossip of a village-parlour—a scorn that kept its freshness in a very tainted air. There was the taint of her sister-in-law; did her husband judge only by the Countess Gemini? This lady very often lied, and she had practised deceptions which were not simply verbal. It was enough to find these facts assumed among Osmond's traditions, without giving them such a general extension. It was her scorn of his assumptions—it was that that made him draw himself up. He had plenty of contempt, and it was proper that his wife should be as well furnished; but that she should turn the hot light of her disdain upon his own conception of things—this was a danger he had not allowed for. He believed he should have regulated her emotions before she came to that; and Isabel could easily imagine how his ears scorched when he discovered that he had been too confident. When one had a wife who gave one that sensation there was nothing left but to hate her!

She was morally certain now that this feeling of hatred, which at first had been a refuge and a refreshment, had become the occupation and comfort of Osmond's life. The feeling was deep, because it was sincere, he had had a revelation that, after all, she could dispense with him. If to herself the idea was startling, if it presented itself at first as a kind of infidelity, a capacity for pollution, what infinite effect might it not be expected to have had upon him? It was very simple; he despised her; she had no traditions, and the moral horizon of a Unitarian minister. Poor Isabel, who had never been able to understand Unitarianism! This was the conviction that she had been living with now for a time that she had ceased to measure. What was coming—what was before them? That was her constant question. What would he do

—what ought she to do? When a man hated his wife, what did it lead to? She didn't hate him, that she was sure of, for every little while she felt a passionate wish to give him a pleasant surprise. Very often, however, she felt afraid, and it used to come over her, as I have intimated, that she had deceived him at the very first. They were strangely married, at all events, and it was an awful life. Until that morning he had scarcely spoken to her for a week; his manner was as dry as a burned-out fire. She knew there was a special reason; he was displeased at Ralph Touchett's staying on in Rome. He thought she saw too much of her cousin—he had told her a week before that it was indecent she should go to him at his hotel. He would have said more than this if Ralph's invalid state had not appeared to make it brutal to denounce him; but having to contain himself only deepened Osmond's disgust. Isabel read all this as she would have read the hour on the clock-face; she was as perfectly aware that the sight of her interest in her cousin stirred her husband's rage, as if Osmond had locked her into her bedroom—which she was sure he wanted to do. It was her honest belief that on the whole she was not defiant; but she certainly could not pretend to be indifferent to Ralph. She believed he was dying, at last, and that she should never see him again, and this gave her a tenderness for him that she had never known before. Nothing was a pleasure to her now; how could anything be a pleasure to a woman who knew that she had thrown away her life? There was an everlasting weight upon her heart—there was a livid light upon everything. But Ralph's little visit was a lamp in the darkness; for the hour that she sat with him her spirit rose. She felt to-day as if he had been her brother. She had never had a brother, but if she had, and she were in trouble, and he were dying, he would be dear to her as Ralph was. Ah yes, if Gilbert was jealous of her there was perhaps some reason; it didn't make Gilbert look better to sit for half-an-hour with Ralph. It was not that they talked of him—it was not that she complained. His name was never uttered between them. It was simply that Ralph was generous and that her husband was not. There was something in Ralph's talk, in his smile, in the mere fact of his being in Rome, that made the blasted circle

round which she walked more spacious. He made her feel the good of the world; he made her feel what might have been. He was, after all, as intelligent as Osmond—quite apart from his being better. And thus it seemed to her an act of devotion to conceal her misery from him. She concealed it elaborately; in their talk she was perpetually hanging out curtains and arranging screens. It lived before her again—it had never had time to die—that morning in the garden at Florence, when he warned her against Osmond. She had only to close her eyes to see the place, to hear his voice, to feel the warm, sweet air. How could he have known? What a mystery! what a wonder of wisdom! As intelligent as Gilbert? He was much more intelligent, to arrive at such a judgment as that. Gilbert had never been so deep, so just. She had told him then that from her at least he should never know if he was right; and this was what she was taking care of now. It gave her plenty to do; there was passion, exaltation, religion in it. Women find their religion sometimes in strange exercises, and Isabel, at present, in playing a part before her cousin, had an idea that she was doing him a kindness. It would have been a kindness, perhaps, if he had been for a single instant a dupe. As it was, the kindness consisted mainly in trying to make him believe that he had once wounded her greatly and that the event had put him to shame, but that as she was very generous and he was so ill, she bore him no grudge and even considerately forbore to flaunt her happiness in his face. Ralph smiled to himself, as he lay on his sofa, at this extraordinary form of consideration; but he forgave her for having forgiven him. She didn't wish him to have the pain of knowing she was unhappy; that was the great thing, and it didn't matter that such knowledge would rather have righted him.

For herself, she lingered in the soundless drawing-room long after the fire had gone out. There was no danger of her feeling the cold; she was in a fever. She heard the small hours strike, and then the great ones, but her vigil took no heed of time. Her mind, assailed by visions, was in a state of extraordinary activity, and her visions might as well come to her there, where she sat up to meet them, as on her pillow,

to make a mockery of rest. As I have said, she believed she was not defiant, and what could be a better proof of it than that she should linger there half the night, trying to persuade herself that there was no reason why Pansy shouldn't be married as you would put a letter in the post-office? When the clock struck four she got up; she was going to bed at last, for the lamp had long since gone out and the candles had burned down to their sockets. But even then she stopped again in the middle of the room, and stood there gazing at a remembered vision—that of her husband and Madame Merle, grouped unconsciously and familiarly.

CHAPTER XLIII

THREE nights after this she took Pansy to a great party, to which Osmond, who never went to dances, did not accompany them. Pansy was as ready for a dance as ever; she was not of a generalising turn, and she had not extended to other pleasures the interdict that she had seen placed on those of love. If she was biding her time or hoping to circumvent her father, she must have had a prevision of success. Isabel thought that this was not likely; it was much more likely that Pansy had simply determined to be a good girl. She had never had such a chance, and she had a proper esteem for chances. She carried herself no less attentively than usual, and kept no less anxious an eye upon her vaporous skirts; she held her bouquet very tight, and counted over the flowers for the twentieth time. She made Isabel feel old; it seemed so long since she had been in a flutter about a ball. Pansy, who was greatly admired, was never in want of partners, and very soon after their arrival she gave Isabel, who was not dancing, her bouquet to hold. Isabel had rendered this service for some minutes when she became aware that Edward Rosier was standing before her. He had lost his affable smile, and wore a look of almost military resolution; the change in his appearance would have made Isabel smile if she had not felt that at bottom his case was a hard one; he had always smelt so much more of heliotrope than of gunpowder. He looked at her a moment somewhat fiercely, as if to notify her that he was dangerous, and then he dropped his eyes on her bouquet. After he had inspected it his glance softened, and he said quickly:

"It's all pansies; it must be hers!"

Isabel smiled kindly.

"Yes, it's hers; she gave it to me to hold."

"May I hold it a little, Mrs. Osmond?" the poor young man asked.

"No, I can't trust you; I am afraid you wouldn't give it back."

"I am not sure that I should; I should leave the house with it instantly. But may I not at least have a single flower?"

Isabel hesitated a moment, and then, smiling still, held out the bouquet.

"Choose one yourself. It's frightful what I am doing for you."

"Ah, if you do no more than this, Mrs. Osmond!" Rosier exclaimed, with his glass in one eye, carefully choosing his flower.

"Don't put it into your button-hole," she said. "Don't for the world!"

"I should like her to see it. She has refused to dance with me, but I wish to show her that I believe in her still."

"It's very well to show it to her, but it's out of place to show it to others. Her father has told her not to dance with you."

"And is that all *you* can do for me? I expected more from you, Mrs. Osmond," said the young man, in a tone of fine general reference. "You know that our acquaintance goes back very far—quite into the days of our innocent childhood."

"Don't make me out too old," Isabel answered, smiling. "You come back to that very often, and I have never denied it. But I must tell you that, old friends as we are, if you had done me the honour to ask me to marry you I should have refused you."

"Ah, you don't esteem me, then. Say at once that you think I'm a trifler!"

"I esteem you very much, but I'm not in love with you. What I mean by that, of course, is that I am not in love with you for Pansy."

"Very good; I see; you pity me, that's all."

And Edward Rosier looked all round, inconsequently, with his single glass.

It was a revelation to him that people shouldn't be more pleased; but he was at least too proud to show that the movement struck him as general.

Isabel for a moment said nothing. His manner and appearance had not the dignity of the deepest tragedy; his little glass, among other things, was against that. But she suddenly felt touched; her own unhappiness, after all, had something in common with his, and it came over her, more than before, that here, in recognisable, if not in romantic form, was the most affecting thing in the world—young love struggling with adversity.

"Would you really be very kind to her?" she said, in a low tone.

He dropped his eyes, devoutly, and raised the little flower which he held in his fingers to his lips. Then he looked at her. "You pity me; but don't you pity her a little?"

"I don't know; I am not sure. She will always enjoy life."

"It will depend on what you call life!" Rosier exclaimed. "She won't enjoy being tortured."

"There will be nothing of that."

"I am glad to hear it. She knows what she is about. You will see."

"I think she does, and she will never disobey her father. But she is coming back to me," Isabel added, "and I must beg you to go away."

Rosier lingered a moment, till Pansy came in sight, on the arm of her cavalier; he stood just long enough to look her in the face. Then he walked away, holding up his head; and the manner in which he achieved this sacrifice to expediency convinced Isabel that he was very much in love.

Pansy, who seldom got disarranged in dancing, and looked perfectly fresh and cool after this exercise, waited a moment and then took back her bouquet. Isabel watched her and saw that she was counting the flowers; whereupon she said to herself that, decidedly, there were deeper forces at play than she had recognised. Pansy had seen Rosier turn away, but she said nothing to Isabel about him; she talked only of her partner, after he had made his bow and retired; of the music, the floor, the rare misfortune of having already torn her dress. Isabel was sure, however, that she perceived that her lover had abstracted a flower; though this knowledge was not needed to account for the dutiful grace with which she responded to the appeal of her next partner. That perfect

amenity under acute constraint was part of a larger system. She was again led forth by a flushed young man, this time carrying her bouquet; and she had not been absent many minutes when Isabel saw Lord Warburton advancing through the crowd. He presently drew near and bade her good evening; she had not seen him since the day before. He looked about him, and then—"Where is the little maid?" he asked. It was in this manner that he formed the harmless habit of alluding to Miss Osmond.

"She is dancing," said Isabel; "you will see her somewhere."

He looked among the dancers, and at last caught Pansy's eye. "She sees me, but she won't notice me," he then remarked. "Are you not dancing?"

"As you see, I'm a wall-flower."

"Won't you dance with me?"

"Thank you; I would rather you should dance with my little maid."

"One needn't prevent the other; especially as she is engaged."

"She is not engaged for everything, and you can reserve yourself. She dances very hard, and you will be the fresher."

"She dances beautifully," said Lord Warburton, following her with his eyes. "Ah, at last," he added, "she has given me a smile." He stood there with his handsome, easy, important physiognomy; and as Isabel observed him it came over her, as it had done before, that it was strange a man of his importance should take an interest in a little maid. It struck her as a great incongruity; neither Pansy's small fascinations, nor his own kindness, his good-nature, not even his need for amusement, which was extreme and constant, were sufficient to account for it. "I shall like to dance with you," he went on in a moment, turning back to Isabel; "but I think I like even better to talk with you."

"Yes, it's better, and it's more worthy of your dignity. Great statesmen oughtn't to waltz."

"Don't be cruel. Why did you recommend me then to dance with Miss Osmond?"

"Ah, that's different. If you dance with her, it would look simply like a piece of kindness—as if you were doing it for

her amusement. If you dance with me you will look as if you were doing it for your own."

"And pray haven't I a right to amuse myself?"

"No, not with the affairs of the British Empire on your hands."

"The British Empire be hanged! You are always laughing at it."

"Amuse yourself with talking to me," said Isabel.

"I am not sure that is a recreation. You are too pointed; I have always to be defending myself. And you strike me as more than usually dangerous to-night. Won't you really dance!"

"I can't leave my place. Pansy must find me here."

He was silent a moment. "You are wonderfully good to her," he said, suddenly.

Isabel stared a little, and smiled. "Can you imagine one's not being?"

"No, indeed. I know how one cares for her. But you must have done a great deal for her."

"I have taken her out with me," said Isabel, smiling still. "And I have seen that she has proper clothes."

"Your society must have been a great benefit to her. You have talked to her, advised her, helped her to develop."

"Ah, yes, if she isn't the rose, she has lived near it."

Isabel laughed, and her companion smiled; but there was a certain visible preoccupation in his face which interfered with complete hilarity. "We all try to live as near it as we can," he said, after a moment's hesitation.

Isabel turned away; Pansy was about to be restored to her, and she welcomed the diversion. We know how much she liked Lord Warburton; she thought him delightful; there was something in his friendship which appeared a kind of resource in case of indefinite need; it was like having a large balance at the bank. She felt happier when he was in the room; there was something reassuring in his approach; the sound of his voice reminded her of the beneficence of nature. Yet for all that it did not please her that he should be too near to her, that he should take too much of her good-will for granted. She was afraid of that; she averted herself from it; she wished he wouldn't. She

felt that if he should come too near, as it were, it was in her to flash out and bid him keep his distance. Pansy came back to Isabel with another rent in her skirt, which was the inevitable consequence of the first, and which she displayed to Isabel with serious eyes. There were too many gentlemen in uniform; they wore those dreadful spurs, which were fatal to the dresses of young girls. It hereupon became apparent that the resources of women are innumerable. Isabel devoted herself to Pansy's desecrated drapery; she fumbled for a pin and repaired the injury; she smiled and listened to her account of her adventures. Her attention, her sympathy, were most active; and they were in direct proportion to a sentiment with which they were in no way connected—a lively conjecture as to whether Lord Warburton was trying to make love to her. It was not simply his words just then; it was others as well; it was the reference and the continuity. This was what she thought about while she pinned up Pansy's dress. If it were so, as she feared, he was of course unconscious; he himself had not taken account of his intention. But this made it none the more auspicious, made the situation none the less unacceptable. The sooner Lord Warburton should come to self-consciousness the better. He immediately began to talk to Pansy—on whom it was certainly mystifying to see that he dropped a smile of chastened devotion. Pansy replied as usual, with a little air of conscientious aspiration; he had to bend toward her a good deal in conversation, and her eyes, as usual, wandered up and down his robust person, as if he had offered it to her for exhibition. She always seemed a little frightened; yet her fright was not of the painful character that suggests dislike; on the contrary, she looked as if she knew that he knew that she liked him. Isabel left them together a little, and wandered toward a friend whom she saw near, and with whom she talked till the music of the following dance began, for which she knew that Pansy was also engaged. The young girl joined her presently, with a little fluttered look, and Isabel, who scrupulously took Osmond's view of his daughter's complete dependence, consigned her, as a precious and momentary loan, to her appointed partner. About all this matter she had her own imaginations, her own reserves;

there were moments when Pansy's extreme adhesiveness made each of them, to her sense, look foolish. But Osmond had given her a sort of tableau of her position as his daughter's duenna, which consisted of gracious alternation of concession and contraction; and there were directions of his which she liked to think that she obeyed to the letter. Perhaps, as regards some of them, it was because her doing so appeared to reduce them to the absurd.

After Pansy had been led away, Isabel found Lord Warburton drawing near her again. She rested her eyes on him, steadily; she wished she could sound his thoughts. But he had no appearance of confusion.

"She has promised to dance with me later," he said.

"I am glad of that. I suppose you have engaged her for the cotillion."

At this he looked a little awkward. "No, I didn't ask her for that. It's a quadrille."

"Ah, you are not clever!" said Isabel, almost angrily. "I told her to keep the cotillion, in case you should ask for it."

"Poor little maid, fancy that!" And Lord Warburton laughed frankly. "Of course I will if you like."

"If I like? Oh, if you dance with her only because I like it!"

"I am afraid I bore her. She seems to have a lot of young fellows on her book."

Isabel dropped her eyes, reflecting rapidly; Lord Warburton stood there looking at her and she felt his eyes on her face. She felt much inclined to ask him to remove them. She did not do so, however; she only said to him, after a minute, looking up—"Please to let me understand."

"Understand what?"

"You told me ten days ago that you should like to marry my step-daughter. You have not forgotten it!"

"Forgotten it? I wrote to Mr. Osmond about it this morning."

"Ah," said Isabel, "he didn't mention to me that he had heard from you."

Lord Warburton stammered a little. "I—I didn't send my letter."

"Perhaps you forgot that."

"No, I wasn't satisfied with it. It's an awkward sort of letter to write, you know. But I shall send it to-night."

"At three o'clock in the morning?"

"I mean later, in the course of the day."

"Very good. You still wish, then, to marry her?"

"Very much indeed."

"Aren't you afraid that you will bore her?" And as her companion stared at this inquiry, Isabel added—"If she can't dance with you for half-an-hour, how will she be able to dance with you for life?"

"Ah," said Lord Warburton, readily, "I will let her dance with other people! About the cotillion, the fact is I thought that you—that you—"

"That I would dance with you? I told you I would dance nothing."

"Exactly; so that while it is going on I might find some quiet corner where we might sit down and talk."

"Oh," said Isabel gravely, "you are much too considerate of me."

When the cotillion came, Pansy was found to have engaged herself, thinking, in perfect humility, that Lord Warburton had no intentions. Isabel recommended him to seek another partner, but he assured her that he would dance with no one but herself. As, however, she had, in spite of the remonstrances of her hostess, declined other invitations on the ground that she was not dancing at all, it was not possible for her to make an exception in Lord Warburton's favour.

"After all, I don't care to dance," he said, "it's a barbarous amusement; I would much rather talk." And he intimated that he had discovered exactly the corner he had been looking for—a quiet nook in one of the smaller rooms, where the music would come to them faintly and not interfere with conversation. Isabel had decided to let him carry out his idea; she wished to be satisfied. She wandered away from the ball-room with him, though she knew that her husband desired she should not lose sight of his daughter. It was with his daughter's *prétendant*, however; that would make it right for Osmond. On her way out of the ball-room she came upon Edward Rosier, who was standing in

a doorway, with folded arms, looking at the dance, in the attitude of a young man without illusions. She stopped a moment and asked him if he were not dancing.

"Certainly not, if I can't dance with her!" he answered.

"You had better go away, then," said Isabel, with the manner of good counsel.

"I shall not go till she does!" And he let Lord Warburton pass, without giving him a look.

This nobleman, however, had noticed the melancholy youth, and he asked Isabel who her dismal friend was, remarking that he had seen him somewhere before.

"It's the young man I have told you about, who is in love with Pansy," said Isabel.

"Ah yes, I remember. He looks rather bad."

"He has reason. My husband won't listen to him."

"What's the matter with him?" Lord Warburton inquired. "He seems very harmless."

"He hasn't money enough, and he isn't very clever."

Lord Warburton listened with interest; he seemed struck with this account of Edward Rosier. "Dear me; he looked a well-set-up young fellow."

"So he is, but my husband is very particular."

"Oh, I see." And Lord Warburton paused a moment. "How much money has he got?" he then ventured to ask.

"Some forty thousand francs a year."

"Sixteen hundred pounds? Ah, but that's very good, you know."

"So I think. But my husband has larger ideas."

"Yes; I have noticed that your husband has very large ideas. Is he really an idiot, the young man?"

"An idiot? Not in the least; he's charming. When he was twelve years old I myself was in love with him.

"He doesn't look much more than twelve to-day," Lord Warburton rejoined, vaguely, looking about him. Then, with more point—"Don't you think we might sit here?" he asked.

"Wherever you please." The room was a sort of boudoir, pervaded by a subdued, rose-coloured light; a lady and gentleman moved out of it as our friends came in. "It's

very kind of you to take such an interest in Mr. Rosier," Isabel said.

"He seems to me rather ill-treated. He had a face a yard long; I wondered what ailed him."

"You are a just man," said Isabel. "You have a kind thought even for a rival."

Lord Warburton turned, suddenly, with a stare. "A rival! Do you call him my rival?"

"Surely—If you both wish to marry the same person."

"Yes—but since he has no chance!"

"All the same, I like you for putting yourself in his place. It shows imagination."

"You like me for it?" And Lord Warburton looked at her with an uncertain eye. "I think you mean that you are laughing at me for it."

"Yes, I am laughing at you, a little. But I like you, too."

"Ah, well, then, let me enter into his situation a little more. What do you suppose one could do for him?"

"Since I have been praising your imagination, I will leave you to imagine that yourself," Isabel said. "Pansy, too, would like you for that."

"Miss Osmond? Ah, she, I flatter myself, likes me already."

"Very much, I think."

He hesitated a little; he was still questioning her face. "Well, then, I don't understand you. You don't mean that she cares for him?"

"Surely, I have told you that I thought she did."

A sudden blush sprung to his face. "You told me that she would have no wish apart from her father's, and as I have gathered that he would favour me—" He paused a little, and then he added—"Don't you see?" suggestively, through his blush.

"Yes, I told you that she had an immense wish to please her father, and that it would probably take her very far."

"That seems to me a very proper feeling," said Lord Warburton.

"Certainly; it's a very proper feeling." Isabel remained silent for some moments; the room continued to be empty; the sound of the music reached them with its richness

softened by the interposing apartments. Then at last she said—"But it hardly strikes me as the sort of feeling to which a man would wish to be indebted for a wife."

"I don't know; if the wife is a good one, and he thinks she does well!"

"Yes, of course you must think that."

"I do; I can't help it. You call that very British, of course."

"No, I don't. I think Pansy would do wonderfully well to marry you, and I don't know who should know it better than you. But you are not in love."

"Ah, yes I am, Mrs. Osmond!"

Isabel shook her head. "You like to think you are, while you sit here with me. But that's not how you strike me."

"I'm not like the young man in the doorway. I admit that. But what makes it so unnatural? Could anything in the world be more charming than Miss Osmond?"

"Nothing, possibly. But love has nothing to do with good reasons."

"I don't agree with you. I am delighted to have good reasons."

"Of course you are. If you were really in love you wouldn't care a straw for them."

"Ah, really in love—really in love!" Lord Warburton exclaimed, folding his arms, leaning back his head, and stretching himself a little. "You must remember that I am forty years old. I won't pretend that I am as I once was."

"Well, if you are sure," said Isabel, "it's all right."

He answered nothing; he sat there, with his head back, looking before him. Abruptly, however, he changed his position; he turned quickly to his companion. "Why, are you so unwilling, so sceptical?"

She met his eye, and for a moment they looked straight at each other. If she wished to be satisfied, she saw something that satisfied her; she saw in his eye the gleam of an idea that she was uneasy on her own account—that she was perhaps even frightened. It expressed a suspicion, not a hope, but such as it was it told her what she wished to know. Not for an instant should he suspect that she

detected in his wish to marry her step-daughter an implication of increased nearness to herself, or that if she did detect it she thought it alarming or compromising. In that brief, extremely personal gaze, however, deeper meanings passed between them than they were conscious of at the moment.

"My dear Lord Warburton," she said, smiling, "you may do, as far as I am concerned, whatever comes into your head."

And with this she got up, and wandered into the adjoining room, where she encountered several acquaintances. While she talked with them she found herself regretting that she had moved; it looked a little like running away—all the more as Lord Warburton didn't follow her. She was glad of this, however, and, at any rate, she was satisfied. She was so well satisfied that when, in passing back into the ball-room, she found Edward Rosier still planted in the doorway, she stopped and spoke to him again.

"You did right not to go away. I have got some comfort for you."

"I need it," the young man murmured, "when I see you so awfully thick with *him!*"

"Don't speak of him, I will do what I can for you. I am afraid it won't be much, but what I can I will do."

He looked at her with gloomy obliqueness. "What has suddenly brought you round?"

"The sense that you are an inconvenience in the doorways!" she answered, smiling, as she passed him. Half-an-hour later she took leave, with Pansy, and at the foot of the staircase the two ladies, with many other departing guests, waited a while for their carriage. Just as it approached, Lord Warburton came out of the house, and assisted them to reach their vehicle. He stood for a moment at the door, asking Pansy if she had amused herself; and she, having answered him, fell back with a little air of fatigue. Then Isabel, at the window, detaining him by a movement of her finger, murmured gently—"Don't forget to send your letter to her father!"

CHAPTER XLIV

THE Countess Gemini was often extremely bored—bored, in her own phrase, to extinction. She had not been extinguished, however, and she struggled bravely enough with her destiny, which had been to marry an unaccommodating Florentine who insisted upon living in his native town, where he enjoyed such consideration as might attach to a gentleman whose talent for losing at cards had not the merit of being incidental to an obliging disposition. The Count Gemini was not liked even by those who won from him; and he bore a name which, having a measurable value in Florence, was, like the local coin of the old Italian states, without currency in other parts of the peninsula. In Rome he was simply a very dull Florentine, and it is not remarkable that he should not have cared to pay frequent visits to a city where, to carry it off, his dulness needed more explanation than was convenient. The Countess lived with her eyes upon Rome, and it was the constant grievance of her life that she had not a habitation there. She was ashamed to say how seldom she had been allowed to go there; it scarcely made the matter better that there were other members of the Florentine nobility who never had been there at all. She went whenever she could; that was all she could say. Or rather, not all; but all she said she could say. In fact, she had much more to say about it, and had often set forth the reasons why she hated Florence and wished to end her days in the shadow of St. Peter's. They are reasons, however, which do not closely concern us, and were usually summed up in the declaration that Rome, in short, was the Eternal City, and that Florence was simply a pretty little place like any other. The Countess apparently needed to connect the idea of eternity with her amusements. She was convinced that society was infinitely more interesting in Rome, where you met celebrities all winter at evening parties. At Florence there were no celebrities; none at least

one had heard of. Since her brother's marriage her impatience had greatly increased; she was so sure that his wife had a more brilliant life than herself. She was not so intellectual as Isabel, but she was intellectual enough to do justice to Rome—not to the ruins and the catacombs, not even perhaps to the church-ceremonies and the scenery; but certainly to all the rest. She heard a great deal about her sister-in-law, and knew perfectly that Isabel was having a beautiful time. She had indeed seen it for herself on the only occasion on which she had enjoyed the hospitality of the Palazzo Roccanera. She had spent a week there during the first winter of her brother's marriage; but she had not been encouraged to renew this satisfaction. Osmond didn't want her—that she was perfectly aware of; but she would have gone all the same, for after all she didn't care two straws about Osmond. But her husband wouldn't let her, and the money-question was always a trouble. Isabel had been very nice; the Countess, who had liked her sister-in-law from the first, had not been blinded by envy to Isabel's personal merits. She had always observed that she got on better with clever women than with silly ones, like herself; the silly ones could never understand her wisdom, whereas the clever ones—the really clever ones—always understood her silliness. It appeared to her that, different as they were in appearance and general style, Isabel and she had a patch of common ground somewhere, which they would set their feet upon at last. It was not very large, but it was firm, and they would both know it when once they touched it. And then she lived, with Mrs. Osmond, under the influence of a pleasant surprise; she was constantly expecting that Isabel would "look down" upon her and she as constantly saw this operation postponed. She asked herself when it would begin; not that she cared much; but she wondered what kept it in abeyance. Her sister-in-law regarded her with none but level glances, and expressed for the poor Countess as little contempt as admiration. In reality, Isabel would as soon have thought of despising her as of passing a moral judgment on a grasshopper. She was not indifferent to her husband's sister, however; she was rather a little afraid of her. She wondered at her; she thought her very extraordinary. The Countess seemed to

her to have no soul; she was like a bright shell, with a polished surface, in which something would rattle when you shook it. This rattle was apparently the Countess's spiritual principle; a little loose nut that tumbled about inside of her. She was too odd for disdain, too anomalous for comparisons. Isabel would have invited her again (there was no question of inviting the Count); but Osmond, after his marriage, had not scrupled to say frankly that Amy was a fool of the worst species—a fool whose folly had the irrepressibility of genius. He said at another time that she had no heart; and he added in a moment that she had given it all away—in small pieces, like a wedding-cake. The fact of not having been asked was of course another obstacle to the Countess's going again to Rome; but at the period with which this history has now to deal, she was in receipt of an invitation to spend several weeks at the Palazzo Roccanera. The proposal had come from Osmond himself, who wrote to his sister that she must be prepared to be very quiet. Whether or no she found in this phrase all the meaning he had put into it, I am unable to say; but she accepted the invitation on any terms. She was curious, moreover; for one of the impressions of her former visit had been that her brother had found his match. Before the marriage she had been sorry for Isabel, so sorry as to have had serious thoughts—if any of the Countess's thoughts were serious—of putting her on her guard. But she had let that pass, and after a little she was reassured. Osmond was as lofty as ever, but his wife would not be an easy victim. The Countess was not very exact at measurements; but it seemed to her that if Isabel should draw herself up she would be the taller spirit of the two. What she wanted to learn now was whether Isabel had drawn herself up; it would give her immense pleasure to see Osmond overtopped.

Several days before she was to start for Rome a servant brought her the card of a visitor—a card with the simple superscription, "Henrietta C. Stackpole." The Countess pressed her finger-tips to her forehead; she did not remember to have known any such Henrietta as that. The servant then remarked that the lady had requested him to say that if the Countess should not recognise her name, she would know

her well enough on seeing her. By the time she appeared before her visitor she had in fact reminded herself that there was once a literary lady at Mrs. Touchett's; the only woman of letters she had ever encountered. That is, the only modern one, since she was the daughter of a defunct poetess. She recognised Miss Stackpole immediately; the more so that Miss Stackpole seemed perfectly unchanged; and the Countess, who was thoroughly good-natured, thought it rather fine to be called on by a person of that sort of distinction. She wondered whether Miss Stackpole had come on account of her mother—whether she had heard of the American Corinne. Her mother was not at all like Isabel's friend; the Countess could see at a glance that this lady was much more modern; and she received an impression of the improvements that were taking place—chiefly in distant countries—in the character (the professional character) of literary ladies. Her mother used to wear a Roman scarf thrown over a pair of bare shoulders, and a gold laurel-wreath set upon a multitude of glossy ringlets. She spoke softly and vaguely, with a kind of Southern accent; she sighed a great deal, and was not at all enterprising. But Henrietta, the Countess could see, was always closely buttoned and compactly braided; there was something brisk and business-like in her appearance, and her manner was almost conscientiously familiar. The Countess could not but feel that the correspondent of the *Interviewer* was much more efficient than the American Corinne.

Henrietta explained that she had come to see the Countess because she was the only person she knew in Florence, and that when she visited a foreign city she liked to see something more than superficial travellers. She knew Mrs. Touchett, but Mrs. Touchett was in America, and even if she had been in Florence Henrietta would not have gone to see her, for Mrs. Touchett was not one of her admirations.

"Do you mean by that that I am?" the Countess asked smiling graciously.

"Well, I like you better than I do her," said Miss Stackpole. "I seem to remember that when I saw you before you were very interesting. I don't know whether it was an accident, or whether it is your usual style. At any rate, I

was a good deal struck with what you said. I made use of it afterwards in print."

"Dear me!" cried the Countess, staring and half-alarmed; "I had no idea I ever said anything remarkable! I wish I had known it."

"It was about the position of woman in this city," Miss Stackpole remarked. "You threw a good deal of light upon it."

"The position of woman is very uncomfortable. Is that what you mean? And you wrote it down and published it?" the Countess went on. "Ah, do let me see it!"

"I will write to them to send you the paper if you like," Henrietta said. "I didn't mention your name; I only said a lady of high rank. And then I quoted your views."

The Countess threw herself hastily backward, tossing up her clasped hands.

"Do you know I am rather sorry you didn't mention my name? I should have rather liked to see my name in the papers. I forget what my views were; I have so many! But I am not ashamed of them. I am not at all like my brother —I suppose you know my brother? He thinks it a kind of disgrace to be put into the papers; if you were to quote him he would never forgive you."

"He needn't be afraid; I shall never refer to him," said Miss Stackpole, with soft dryness. "That's another reason," she added, "why I wanted to come and see you. You know Mr. Osmond married my dearest friend."

"Ah, yes; you were a friend of Isabel's. I was trying to think what I knew about you."

"I am quite willing to be known by that," Henrietta declared. "But that isn't what your brother likes to know me by. He has tried to break up my relations with Isabel."

"Don't permit it," said the Countess.

"That's what I want to talk about. I am going to Rome."

"So am I!" the Countess cried. "We will go together."

"With great pleasure. And when I write about my journey I will mention you by name, as my companion."

The Countess sprang from her chair and came and sat on the sofa beside her visitor.

"Ah, you must send me the paper! My husband won't like it; but he need never see it. Besides, he doesn't know how to read."

Henrietta's large eyes became immense.

"Doesn't know how to read? May I put that into my letter?"

"Into your letter?"

"In the *Interviewer*. That's my paper."

"Oh yes, if you like; with his name. Are you going to stay with Isabel?"

Henrietta held up her head, gazing a little in silence at her hostess.

"She has not asked me. I wrote to her I was coming, and she answered that she would engage a room for me at a *pension*."

The Countess listened with extreme interest.

"That's Osmond," she remarked, pregnantly.

"Isabel ought to resist," said Miss Stackpole. "I am afraid she has changed a great deal. I told her she would."

"I am sorry to hear it; I hoped she would have her own way. Why doesn't my brother like you?" the Countess added, ingenuously.

"I don't know, and I don't care. He is perfectly welcome not to like me; I don't want every one to like me; I should think less of myself if some people did. A journalist can't hope to do much good unless he gets a good deal hated; that's the way he knows how his work goes on. And it's just the same for a lady. But I didn't expect it of Isabel."

"Do you mean that she hates you?" the Countess inquired.

"I don't know; I want to see. That's what I am going to Rome for."

"Dear me, what a tiresome errand!" the Countess exclaimed.

"She doesn't write to me in the same way; it's easy to see there's a difference. If you know anything," Miss Stackpole went on, "I should like to hear it beforehand, so as to decide on the line I shall take."

The Countess thrust out her under lip and gave a gradual shrug.

"I know very little; I see and hear very little of Osmond. He doesn't like me any better than he appears to like you."

"Yet you are not a lady-correspondent," said Henrietta, pensively.

"Oh, he has plenty of reasons. Nevertheless they have invited me—I am to stay in the house!" And the Countess smiled almost fiercely; her exultation, for the moment, took little account of Miss Stackpole's disappointment.

This lady, however, regarded it very placidly.

"I should not have gone if she had asked me. That is, I think I should not; and I am glad I hadn't to make up my mind. It would have been a very difficult question. I should not have liked to turn away from her, and yet I should not have been happy under her roof. A *pension* will suit me very well. But that is not all."

"Rome is very good just now," said the Countess; "there are all sorts of smart people. Did you ever hear of Lord Warburton?"

"Hear of him? I know him very well. Do you consider him very smart?" Henrietta inquired.

"I don't know him, but I am told he is extremely *grand seigneur*. He is making love to Isabel."

"Making love to her?"

"So I'm told; I don't know the details," said the Countess lightly. "But Isabel is pretty safe."

Henrietta gazed earnestly at her companion; for a moment she said nothing.

"When do you go to Rome?" she inquired, abruptly.

"Not for a week, I am afraid."

"I shall go to-morrow," Henrietta said. "I think I had better not wait."

"Dear me, I am sorry; I am having some dresses made. I am told Isabel receives immensely. But I shall see you there: I shall call on you at your *pension*." Henrietta sat still—she was lost in thought; and suddenly the Countess cried, "Ah, but if you don't go with me you can't describe our journey!"

Miss Stackpole seemed unmoved by this consideration; she was thinking of something else, and she presently expressed it.

"I am not sure that I understand you about Lord Warburton."

"Understand me? I mean he's very nice, that's all."

"Do you consider it nice to make love to married women?" Henrietta inquired, softly.

The Countess stared, and then, with a little violent laugh—

"It's certain that all the nice men do it. Get married and you'll see!" she added.

"That idea would be enough to prevent me," said Miss Stackpole. "I should want my own husband; I shouldn't want any one else's. Do you mean that Isabel is guilty—is guilty—" and she paused a little, choosing her expression.

"Do I mean she's guilty? Oh dear no, not yet, I hope. I only mean that Osmond is very tiresome, and that Lord Warburton is, as I hear, a great deal at the house. I'm afraid you are scandalised."

"No, I am very anxious," Henrietta said.

"Ah, you are not very complimentary to Isabel! You should have more confidence. I tell you," the Countess added quickly, "if it will be a comfort to you I will engage to draw him off."

Miss Stackpole answered at first only with the deeper solemnity of her eyes.

"You don't understand me," she said after a while. "I haven't the idea that you seem to suppose. I am not afraid for Isabel—in that way. I am only afraid she is unhappy—that's what I want to get at."

The Countess gave a dozen turns of the head; she looked impatient and sarcastic.

"That may very well be; for my part I should like to know whether Osmond is."

Miss Stackpole had begun to bore her a little.

"If she is really changed that must be at the bottom of it," Henrietta went on.

"You will see; she will tell you," said the Countess.

"Ah, she may not tell me—that's what I am afraid of!"

"Well, if Osmond isn't enjoying himself I flatter myself I shall discover it," the Countess rejoined.

"I don't care for that," said Henrietta.

"I do immensely! If Isabel is unhappy I am very sorry for her, but I can't help it. I might tell her something that would make her worse, but I can't tell her anything that would console her. What did she go and marry him for? If she had listened to me she would have got rid of him. I will forgive her, however, if I find she has made things hot for him! If she has simply allowed him to trample upon her I don't know that I shall even pity her. But I don't think that's very likely. I count upon finding that if she is miserable she has at least made him so."

Henrietta got up; these seemed to her, naturally, very dreadful expectations. She honestly believed that she had no desire to see Mr. Osmond unhappy; and indeed he could not be for her the subject of a flight of fancy. She was on the whole rather disappointed in the Countess, whose mind moved in a narrower circle than she had imagined.

"It will be better if they love each other," she said gravely.

"They can't. He can't love any one."

"I presumed that was the case. But it only increases my fear for Isabel. I shall positively start to-morrow."

"Isabel certainly has devotees," said the Countess, smiling very vividly. "I declare I don't pity her."

"It may be that I can't assist her," said Miss Stackpole, as if it were well not to have illusions.

"You can have wanted to, at any rate; that's something. I believe that's what you came from America for," the Countess suddenly added.

"Yes, I wanted to look after her," Henrietta said, serenely.

Her hostess stood there smiling at her, with her small bright eyes and her eager-looking nose; a flush had come into each of her cheeks.

"Ah, that's very pretty—*c'est bien gentil!*" she said. "Isn't that what they call friendship?"

"I don't know what they call it. I thought I had better come."

"She is very happy—she is very fortunate," the Countess went on. "She has others besides." And then she broke out, passionately. "She is more fortunate than I! I am as unhappy as she—I have a very bad husband; he is a great deal worse than Osmond. And I have no friends. I thought I

had, but they are gone. No one would do for me what you have done for her."

Henrietta was touched; there was nature in this bitter effusion. She gazed at her companion a moment, and then—

"Look here, Countess, I will do anything for you that you like. I will wait over and travel with you."

"Never mind," the Countess answered, with a quick change of tone; "only describe me in the newspaper!"

Henrietta, before leaving her, however, was obliged to make her understand that she could not give a fictitious representation of her journey to Rome. Miss Stackpole was a strictly veracious reporter.

On quitting the Countess she took her way to the Lung' Arno, the sunny quay beside the yellow river, where the bright-faced hotels familiar to tourists stand all in a row. She had learned her way before this through the streets of Florence (she was very quick in such matters), and was therefore able to turn with great decision of step out of the little square which forms the approach to the bridge of the Holy Trinity. She proceeded to the left, towards the Ponte Vecchio, and stopped in front of one of the hotels which overlook that delightful structure. Here she drew forth a small pocket-book, took from it a card and a pencil, and, after meditating a moment, wrote a few words. It is our privilege to look over her shoulder, and if we exercise it we may read the brief query—"Could I see you this evening for a few moments on a very important matter?" Henrietta added that she should start on the morrow for Rome. Armed with this little document she approached the porter, who now had taken up his station in the doorway, and asked if Mr. Goodwood were at home. The porter replied, as porters always reply, that he had gone out about twenty minutes before; whereupon Henrietta presented her card and begged it might be handed to him on his return. She left the inn and took her course along the quay to the severe portico of the Uffizi, through which she presently reached the entrance of the famous gallery of paintings. Making her way in, she ascended the high staircase which leads to the upper chambers. The long corridor, glazed on one side and decorated with antique busts, which gives admission to these apart-

ments, presented an empty vista, in which the bright winter light twinkled upon the marble floor. The gallery is very cold, and during the midwinter weeks is but scantily visited. Miss Stackpole may appear more ardent in her quest of artistic beauty than she has hitherto struck us as being, but she had after all her preferences and admirations. One of the latter was the little Correggio of the Tribune—the Virgin kneeling down before the sacred infant, who lies in a litter of straw, and clapping her hands to him while he delightedly laughs and crows. Henrietta had taken a great fancy to this intimate scene—she thought it the most beautiful picture in the world. On her way, at present, from New York to Rome, she was spending but three days in Florence, but she had reminded herself that they must not elapse without her paying another visit to her favourite work of art. She had a great sense of beauty in all ways, and it involved a good many intellectual obligations. She was about to turn into the Tribune when a gentleman came out of it; whereupon she gave a little exclamation and stood before Caspar Goodwood.

"I have just been at your hotel," she said. "I left a card for you."

"I am very much honoured," Caspar Goodwood answered, as if he really meant it.

"It was not to honour you I did it; I have called on you before, and I know you don't like it. It was to talk to you a little about something."

He looked for a moment at the buckle in her hat. "I shall be very glad to bear what you wish to say."

"You don't like to talk with me," said Henrietta. "But I don't care for that; I don't talk for your amusement. I wrote a word to ask you to come and see me; but since I have met you here this will do as well."

"I was just going away," Goodwood said; "but of course I will stop." He was civil, but he was not enthusiastic.

Henrietta, however, never looked for great professions, and she was so much in earnest that she was thankful he would listen to her on any terms. She asked him first, however, if he had seen all the pictures.

"All I want to. I have been here an hour."

"I wonder if you have seen my Correggio," said Henrietta. "I came up on purpose to have a look at it." She went into the Tribune, and he slowly accompanied her.

"I suppose I have seen it, but I didn't know it was yours. I don't remember pictures—especially that sort." She had pointed out her favourite work; and he asked her if it was about Correggio that she wished to talk with him.

"No," said Henrietta, "it's about something less harmonious!" They had the small, brilliant room, a splendid cabinet of treasures, to themselves; there was only a custode hovering about the Medicean Venus. "I want you to do me a favour," Miss Stackpole went on.

Caspar Goodwood frowned a little, but he expressed no embarrassment at the sense of not looking eager. His face was that of a much older man than our earlier friend. "I'm sure it's something I shan't like," he said, rather loud.

"No, I don't think you will like it. If you did, it would be no favour."

"Well, let us hear it," he said in the tone of a man quite conscious of his own reasonableness.

"You may say there is no particular reason why you should do me a favour. Indeed, I only know of one: the fact that if you would let me I would gladly do you one." Her soft, exact tone, in which there was no attempt at effect, had an extreme sincerity; and her companion, though he presented rather a hard surface, could not help being touched by it. When he was touched he rarely showed it, however, by the usual signs; he neither blushed, nor looked away, nor looked conscious. He only fixed his attention more directly; he seemed to consider with added firmness. Henrietta went on therefore disinterestedly, without the sense of an advantage. "I may say now, indeed—it seems a good time—that if I have ever annoyed you (and I think sometimes that I have), it is because I knew that I was willing to suffer annoyance for you. I have troubled you—doubtless. But I would take trouble for you."

Goodwood hesitated.

"You are taking trouble now."

"Yes, I am, some. I want you to consider whether it is better on the whole that you should go to Rome."

"I thought you were going to say that!" Goodwood exclaimed, rather artlessly.

"You *have* considered it, then?"

"Of course I have, very carefully. I have looked all round it. Otherwise I shouldn't have come as far as this. That's what I stayed in Paris two months for; I was thinking it over."

"I am afraid you decided as you liked. You decided it was best, because you were so much attracted."

"Best for whom, do you mean?" Goodwood inquired.

"Well, for yourself first. For Mrs. Osmond next."

"Oh, it won't do her any good! I don't flatter myself that."

"Won't it do her harm?—that's the question."

"I don't see what it will matter to her. I am nothing to Mrs. Osmond. But if you want to know, I do want to see her myself."

"Yes, and that's why you go."

"Of course it is. Could there be a better reason?"

"How will it help you? that's what I want to know," said Miss Stackpole.

"That's just what I can't tell you; it's just what I was thinking about in Paris."

"It will make you more discontented."

"Why do you say more so?" Goodwood asked, rather sternly. "How do you know I am discontented?"

"Well," said Henrietta, hesitating a little—"you seem never to have cared for another."

"How do you know what I care for?" he cried, with a big blush. "Just now I care to go to Rome."

Henrietta looked at him in silence, with a sad yet luminous expression.

"Well," she observed, at last, "I only wanted to tell you what I think; I had it on my mind. Of course you think it's none of my business. But nothing is any one's business, on that principle."

"It's very kind of you; I am greatly obliged to you for your interest," said Caspar Goodwood. "I shall go to Rome, and I shan't hurt Mrs. Osmond."

"You won't hurt her, perhaps. But will you help her?—that is the question."

"Is she in need of help?" he asked, slowly, with a penetrating look.

"Most women always are," said Henrietta, with conscientious evasiveness, and generalising less hopefully than usual. "If you go to Rome," she added, "I hope you will be a true friend—not a selfish one!" And she turned away and began to look at the pictures.

Caspar Goodwood let her go, and stood watching her while she wandered round the room; then, after a moment, he rejoined her. "You have heard something about her here," he said in a moment. "I should like to know what you have heard."

Henrietta had never prevaricated in her life, and though on this occasion there might have been a fitness in doing so, she decided, after a moment's hesitation, to make no superficial exception. "Yes, I have heard," she answered; "but as I don't want you to go to Rome I won't tell you."

"Just as you please. I shall see for myself," said Goodwood. Then inconsistently—for him, "You have heard she is unhappy!" he added.

"Oh, you won't see that!" Henrietta exclaimed.

"I hope not. When do you start?"

"To-morrow, by the evening train. And you?"

Goodwood hesitated; he had no desire to make his journey to Rome in Miss Stackpole's company. His indifference to this advantage was not of the same character as Gilbert Osmond's, but it had at this moment an equal distinctness. It was rather a tribute to Miss Stackpole's virtues than a reference to her faults. He thought her very remarkable, very brilliant, and he had, in theory, no objection to the class to which she belonged. Lady correspondents appeared to him a part of the natural scheme of things in a progressive country, and though he never read their letters he supposed that they ministered somehow to social progress. But it was this very eminence of their position that made him wish that Miss Stackpole did not take so much for granted. She took for granted that he was always ready for some allusion to Mrs. Osmond; she had done so when they met in Paris, six weeks after his arrival in Europe, and she had repeated the assumption with every successive opportunity. He had no

wish whatever to allude to Mrs. Osmond; he was *not* always thinking of her; he was perfectly sure of that. He was the most reserved, the least colloquial of men, and this inquiring authoress was constantly flashing her lantern into the quiet darkness of his soul. He wished she didn't care so much; he even wished, though it might seem rather brutal of him, that she would leave him alone. In spite of this, however, he just now made other reflections—which show how widely different, in effect, his ill-humour was from Gilbert Osmond's. He wished to go immediately to Rome; he would have liked to go alone, in the night-train. He hated the European railway-carriages, in which one sat for hours in a vice, knee to knee and nose to nose with a foreigner to whom one presently found one's self objecting with all the added vehemence of one's wish to have the window open; and if they were worse at night even than by day, at least at night one could sleep and dream of an American saloon-car. But he could not take a night-train when Miss Stackpole was starting in the morning; it seemed to him that this would be an insult to an unprotected woman. Nor could he wait until after she had gone, unless he should wait longer than he had patience for. It would not do to start the next day. She worried him; she oppressed him; the idea of spending the day in a European railway-carriage with her offered a complication of irritations. Still, she was a lady travelling alone; it was his duty to put himself out for her. There could be no two questions about that; it was a perfectly clear necessity. He looked extremely grave for some moments, and then he said, without any of the richness of gallantry, but in a tone of extreme distinctness—"Of course, if you are going to-morrow, I will go too, as I may be of assistance to you."

"Well, Mr. Goodwood, I should hope so!" Henrietta remarked, serenely.

CHAPTER XLV

I HAVE already had reason to say that Isabel knew that her husband was displeased by the continuance of Ralph's visit to Rome. This knowledge was very present to her as she went to her cousin's hotel the day after she had invited Lord Warburton to give a tangible proof of his sincerity; and at this moment, as at others, she had a sufficient perception of the sources of Osmond's displeasure. He wished her to have no freedom of mind, and he knew perfectly well that Ralph was an apostle of freedom. It was just because he was this, Isabel said to herself, that it was a refreshment to go and see him. It will be perceived that she partook of this refreshment in spite of her husband's disapproval; that is, she partook of it, as she flattered herself, discreetly. She had not as yet undertaken to act in direct opposition to Osmond's wishes; he was her master; she gazed at moments with a sort of incredulous blankness at this fact. It weighed upon her imagination, however; constantly present to her mind were all the traditionary decencies and sanctities of marriage. The idea of violating them filled her with shame as well as with dread, for when she gave herself away she had lost sight of this contingency in the perfect belief that her husband's intentions were as generous as her own. She seemed to see, however, the rapid approach of the day when she should have to take back something that she had solemnly given. Such a ceremony would be odious and monstrous; she tried to shut her eyes to it meanwhile. Osmond would do nothing to help it by beginning first; he would put that burden upon her. He had not yet formally forbidden her to go and see Ralph; but she felt sure that unless Ralph should very soon depart this prohibition would come. How could poor Ralph depart? The weather as yet made it impossible. She could perfectly understand her husband's wish for the event; to be just, she didn't see how he could like her to be with her cousin. Ralph never said

a word against him; but Osmond's objections were none the less founded. If Osmond should positively interpose, then she should have to decide, and that would not be easy. The prospect made her heart beat and her cheeks burn, as I say, in advance; there were moments when, in her wish to avoid an open rupture with her husband, she found herself wishing that Ralph would start even at a risk. And it was of no use that when catching herself in this state of mind, she called herself a feeble spirit, a coward. It was not that she loved Ralph less, but that almost anything seemed preferable to repudiating the most serious act—the single sacred act—of her life. That appeared to make the whole future hideous. To break with Osmond once would be to break for ever; any open acknowledgment of irreconcilable needs would be an admission that their whole attempt had proved a failure. For them there could be no condonement, no compromise, no easy forgetfulness, no formal readjustment. They had attempted only one thing, but that one thing was to have been exquisite. Once they missed it, nothing else would do; there is no substitute for that success. For the moment, Isabel went to the Hôtel de Paris as often as she thought well; the measure of expediency resided in her moral consciousness. It had been very liberal to-day, for in addition to the general truth that she couldn't leave Ralph to die alone, she had something important to ask of him. This indeed was Gilbert's business as well as her own.

She came very soon to what she wished to speak of.

"I want you to answer me a question," she said. "It's about Lord Warburton."

"I think I know it," Ralph answered from his arm-chair, out of which his thin legs protruded at greater length than ever.

"It's very possible," said Isabel. "Please then answer it."

"Oh, I don't say I can do that."

"You are intimate with him," said Isabel; "you have a great deal of observation of him."

"Very true. But think how he must dissimulate!"

"Why should he dissimulate? That's not his nature."

"Ah, you must remember that the circumstances are peculiar," said Ralph, with an air of private amusement.

"To a certain extent—yes. But is he really in love?"

"Very much, I think. I can make that out."

"Ah!" said Isabel, with a certain dryness.

Ralph looked at her a moment; a shade of perplexity mingled with his mild hilarity.

"You said that as if you were disappointed."

Isabel got up, slowly, smoothing her gloves, and eyeing them thoughtfully.

"It's after all no business of mine."

"You are very philosophic," said her cousin. And then in a moment—"May I inquire what you are talking about?"

Isabel stared a little. "I thought you knew. Lord Warburton tells me he desires to marry Pansy. I have told you that before, without eliciting a comment from you. You might risk one this morning, I think. Is it your belief that he really cares for her?"

"Ah, for Pansy, no!" cried Ralph, very positively.

But you just said now that he did."

Ralph hesitated a moment. "That he cared for you, Mrs. Osmond."

Isabel shook her head, gravely. "That's nonsense, you know."

"Of course it is. But the nonsense is Warburton's, not mine."

"That would be very tiresome," Isabel said, speaking, as she flattered herself, with much subtlety.

"I ought to tell you indeed," Ralph went on, "that to me he has denied it."

"It's very good of you to talk about it together! Has he also told you that he is in love with Pansy?"

"He has spoken very well of her—very properly. He has let me know, of course, that he thinks she would do very well at Lockleigh."

"Does he really think it?"

"Ah, what Warburton really thinks——!" said Ralph.

Isabel fell to smoothing her gloves again; they were long, loose gloves upon which she could freely expend herself. Soon, however, she looked up, and then—

"Ah, Ralph, you give me no help!" she cried abruptly, passionately.

It was the first time she had alluded to the need for help, and the words shook her cousin with their violence. He gave a long murmur of relief, of pity, of tenderness; it seemed to him that at last the gulf between them had been bridged. It was this that made him exclaim in a moment—

"How unhappy you must be!"

He had no sooner spoken than she recovered her self-possession, and the first use she made of it was to pretend she had not heard him.

"When I talk of your helping me, I talk great nonsense," she said with a quick smile. "The idea of my troubling you with my domestic embarrassments! The matter is very simple; Lord Warburton must get on by himself. I can't undertake to help him."

"He ought to succeed easily," said Ralph.

Isabel hesitated a moment. "Yes—but he has not always succeeded."

"Very true. You know, however, how that always surprised me. Is Miss Osmond capable of giving us a surprise?"

"It will come from him, rather. I suspect that after all he will let the matter drop."

"He will do nothing dishonourable," said Ralph.

"I am very sure of that. Nothing can be more honourable than for him to leave the poor child alone. She cares for some one else, and it is cruel to attempt to bribe her by magnificent offers to give him up."

"Cruel to the other person perhaps—the one she cares for. But Warburton isn't obliged to mind that."

"No, cruel to her," said Isabel. "She would be very unhappy if she were to allow herself to be persuaded to desert poor Mr. Rosier. That idea seems to amuse you; of course you are not in love with him. He has the merit of being in love with her. She can see at a glance that Lord Warburton is not."

"He would be very good to her," said Ralph.

"He has been good to her already. Fortunately, however, he has not said a word to disturb her. He could come and bid her good-bye to-morrow with perfect propriety."

"How would your husband like that?"

"Not at all; and he may be right in not liking it. Only he must obtain satisfaction himself."

"Has he commissioned you to obtain it?" Ralph ventured to ask.

"It was natural that as an old friend of Lord Warburton's —an older friend, that is, than Osmond—I should take an interest in his intentions."

"Take an interest in his renouncing them, you mean."

Isabel hesitated, frowning a little. "Let me understand. Are you pleading his cause?"

"Not in the least. I am very glad he should not become your step-daughter's husband. It makes such a very queer relation to you!" said Ralph, smiling. "But I'm rather nervous lest your husband should think you haven't pushed him enough."

Isabel found herself able to smile as well as he.

"He knows me well enough not to have expected me to push. He himself has no intention of pushing, I presume. I am not afraid I shall not be able to justify myself!" she said, lightly.

Her mask had dropped for an instant, but she had put it on again, to Ralph's infinite disappointment. He had caught a glimpse of her natural face, and he wished immensely to look into it. He had an almost savage desire to hear her complain of her husband—hear her say that she should be held accountable for Lord Warburton's defection. Ralph was certain that this was her situation; he knew by instinct, in advance, the form that in such an event Osmond's displeasure would take. It could only take the meanest and cruellest. He would have liked to warn Isabel of it—to let her see at least that he knew it. It little mattered that Isabel would know it much better; it was for his own satisfaction more than for hers that he longed to show her that he was not deceived. He tried and tried again to make her betray Osmond; he felt cold-blooded, cruel, dishonourable almost, in doing so. But it scarcely mattered, for he only failed. What had she come for then, and why did she seem almost to offer him a chance to violate their tacit convention? Why did she ask him his advice, if she gave him no liberty to answer her? How could they talk of her domestic embar-

rassments, as it pleased her humorously to designate them, if the principal factor was not to be mentioned? These contradictions were themselves but an indication of her trouble, and her cry for help, just before, was the only thing he was bound to consider.

"You will be decidedly at variance, all the same," he said, in a moment. And as she answered nothing, looking as if she scarcely understood—"You will find yourselves thinking very differently," he continued.

"That may easily happen, among the most united couples!" She took up her parasol; he saw that she was nervous, afraid of what he might say. "It's a matter we can hardly quarrel about, however," she added; "for almost all the interest is on his side. That is very natural. Pansy is after all his daughter—not mine." And she put out her hand to wish him good-bye.

Ralph took an inward resolution that she should not leave him without his letting her know that he knew everything; it seemed too great an opportunity to lose. "Do you know what his interest will make him say?" he asked, as he took her hand. She shook her head, rather dryly—not discouragingly—and he went on, "It will make him say that your want of zeal is owing to jealousy." He stopped a moment; her face made him afraid.

"To jealousy?"

"To jealousy of his daughter."

She blushed red and threw back her head.

"You are not kind," she said, in a voice that he had never heard on her lips.

"Be frank with me, and you'll see," said Ralph.

But she made no answer; she only shook her hand out of his own, which he tried still to hold, and rapidly went out of the room. She made up her mind to speak to Pansy, and she took an occasion on the same day, going to the young girl's room before dinner. Pansy was already dressed; she was always in advance of the time; it seemed to illustrate her pretty patience and the graceful stillness with which she could sit and wait. At present she was seated in her fresh array, before the bed-room fire; she had blown out her candles on the completion of her toilet, in accordance with

the economical habits in which she had been brought up and which she was now more careful than ever to observe; so that the room was lighted only by a couple of logs. The rooms in the Palazzo Roccanera were as spacious as they were numerous, and Pansy's virginal bower was an immense chamber, with a dark, heavily-timbered ceiling. Its diminutive mistress, in the midst of it, appeared but a speck of humanity, and as she got up, with quick deference, to welcome Isabel, the latter was more than ever struck with her shy sincerity. Isabel had a difficult task—the only thing was to perform it as simply as possible. She felt bitter and angry, but she warned herself against betraying it to Pansy. She was afraid even of looking too grave, or at least too stern; she was afraid of frightening her. But Pansy seemed to have guessed that she had come a little as a confessor; for after she had moved the chair in which she had been sitting a little nearer to the fire, and Isabel had taken her place in it, she kneeled down on a cushion in front of her, looking up and resting her clasped hands on her stepmother's knees. What Isabel wished to do was to hear from her own lips that her mind was not occupied with Lord Warburton; but if she desired the assurance, she felt herself by no means at liberty to provoke it. The girl's father would have qualified this as rank treachery; and indeed Isabel knew that if Pansy should display the smallest germ of a disposition to encourage Lord Warburton, her own duty was to hold her tongue. It was difficult to interrogate without appearing to suggest; Pansy's supreme simplicity, an innocence even more complete than Isabel had yet judged it, gave to the most tentative inquiry something of the effect of an admonition. As she knelt there in the vague firelight, with her pretty dress vaguely shining, her hands folded half in appeal and half in submission, her soft eyes, raised and fixed, full of the seriousness of the situation, she looked to Isabel like a childish martyr decked out for sacrifice and scarcely presuming even to hope to avert it. When Isabel said to her that she had never yet spoken to her of what might have been going on in relation to her getting married, but that her silence had not been indifference or ignorance, had only been the desire to leave her at liberty, Pansy bent forward, raised her face

nearer and nearer to Isabel's, and with a little murmur which evidently expressed a deep longing, answered that she had greatly wished her to speak, and that she begged her to advise her now.

"It's difficult for me to advise you," Isabel rejoined. "I don't know how I can undertake that. That's for your father; you must get his advice, and, above all, you must act upon it."

At this Pansy dropped her eyes; for a moment she said nothing.

"I think I should like your advice better than papa's," she presently remarked.

"That's not as it should be," said Isabel, coldly. "I love you very much, but your father loves you better."

"It isn't because you love me—it's because you're a lady," Pansy answered, with the air of saying something very reasonable. "A lady can advise a young girl better than a man."

"I advise you, then, to pay the greatest respect to your father's wishes."

"Ah, yes," said Pansy, eagerly, "I must do that."

"But if I speak to you now about your getting married, it's not for your own sake, it's for mine," Isabel went on. "If I try to learn from you what you expect, what you desire, it is only that I may act accordingly."

Pansy stared, and then, very quickly—

"Will you do everything I desire?" she asked.

"Before I say yes, I must know what such things are."

Pansy presently told her that the only thing she wished in life was to marry Mr. Rosier. He had asked her, and she had told him that she would do so if her papa would allow it. Now her papa wouldn't allow it.

"Very well, then, it's impossible," said Isabel.

"Yes, it's impossible," said Pansy, without a sigh, and with the same extreme attention in her clear little face.

"You must think of something else, then," Isabel went on; but Pansy, sighing then, told her that she had attempted this feat without the least success.

"You think of those that think of you," she said, with a faint smile. "I know that Mr. Rosier thinks of me."

"He ought not to," said Isabel, loftily. "Your father has expressly requested he shouldn't."

"He can't help it, because he knows that I think of him."

"You shouldn't think of him. There is some excuse for him, perhaps; but there is none for you!"

"I wish you would try to find one," the girl exclaimed, as if she were praying to the Madonna.

"I should be very sorry to attempt it," said the Madonna, with unusual frigidity. "If you knew some one else was thinking of you, would you think of him?"

"No one can think of me as Mr. Rosier does; no one has the right."

"Ah, but I don't admit Mr. Rosier's right," Isabel cried, hypocritically.

Pansy only gazed at her; she was evidently deeply puzzled; and Isabel, taking advantage of it, began to represent to her the miserable consequences of disobeying her father. At this Pansy stopped her, with the assurance that she would never disobey him, would never marry without his consent. And she announced, in the serenest, simplest tone, that though she might never marry Mr. Rosier, she would never cease to think of him. She appeared to have accepted the idea of eternal singleness; but Isabel of course was free to reflect that she had no conception of its meaning. She was perfectly sincere; she was prepared to give up her lover. This might seem an important step toward taking another, but for Pansy, evidently, it did not lead in that direction. She felt no bitterness towards her father; there was no bitterness in her heart; there was only the sweetness of fidelity to Edward Rosier, and a strange, exquisite intimation that she could prove it better by remaining single than even by marrying him.

"Your father would like you to make a better marriage," said Isabel. "Mr. Rosier's fortune is not very large."

"How do you mean better—if that would be good enough? And I have very little money; why should I look for a fortune?"

"Your having so little is a reason for looking for more." Isabel was grateful for the dimness of the room; she felt as if her face were hideously insincere. She was doing this for

Osmond; this was what one had to do for Osmond! Pansy's solemn eyes, fixed on her own, almost embarrassed her; she was ashamed to think that she had made so light of the girl's preference.

"What should you like me to do?" said Pansy, softly.

The question was a terrible one, and Isabel pusillanimously took refuge in a generalisation.

"To remember all the pleasure it is in your power to give your father."

"To marry some one else, you mean—if he should ask me?"

For a moment Isabel's answer caused itself to be waited for; then she heard herself utter it, in the stillness that Pansy's attention seemed to make.

"Yes—to marry some one else."

Pansy's eyes grew more penetrating; Isabel believed that she was doubting her sincerity, and the impression took force from her slowly getting up from her cushion. She stood there a moment, with her small hands unclasped, and then she said, with a timorous sigh—

"Well, I hope no one will ask me!"

"There has been a question of that. Some one else would have been ready to ask you."

"I don't think he can have been ready," said Pansy.

"It would appear so—if he had been sure that he would succeed."

"If he had been sure? Then he was not ready!"

Isabel thought this rather sharp; she also got up, and stood a moment looking into the fire. "Lord Warburton has shown you great attention," she said; "of course you know it's of him I speak."

She found herself, against her expectation, almost placed in the position of justifying herself; which led her to introduce this nobleman more crudely than she had intended.

"He has been very kind to me, and I like him very much. But if you mean that he will ask me to marry him, I think you are mistaken."

"Perhaps I am. But your father would like it extremely."

Pansy shook her head, with a little wise smile. "Lord Warburton won't ask me simply to please papa."

"Your father would like you to encourage him," Isabel went on, mechanically.

"How can I encourage him?"

"I don't know. Your father must tell you that."

Pansy said nothing for a moment; she only continued to smile as if she were in possession of a bright assurance. "There is no danger—no danger!" she declared at last.

There was a conviction in the way she said this, and a felicity in her believing it, which made Isabel feel very awkward. She felt accused of dishonesty, and the idea was disgusting. To repair her self-respect, she was on the point of saying that Lord Warburton had let her know that there *was* a danger. But she did not; she only said—in her embarrassment rather wide of the mark—that he surely had been most kind, most friendly.

"Yes, he has been very kind," Pansy answered. "That's what I like him for."

"Why then is the difficulty so great?"

"I have always felt sure that he knows that I don't want —what did you say I should do?—to encourage him. He knows I don't want to marry, and he wants me to know that he therefore won't trouble me. That's the meaning of his kindness. It's as if he said to me, 'I like you very much, but if it doesn't please you I will never say it again.' I think that is very kind, very noble," Pansy went on, with deepening positiveness. "That is all we have said to each other. And he doesn't care for me, either. Ah no, there is no danger!"

Isabel was touched with wonder at the depths of perception of which this submissive little person was capable; she felt afraid of Pansy's wisdom—began almost to retreat before it. "You must tell your father that," she remarked, reservedly.

"I think I would rather not," Pansy answered.

"You ought not let him have false hopes."

"Perhaps not; but it will be good for me that he should. So long as he believes that Lord Warburton intends anything of the kind you say, papa won't propose any one else. And that will be an advantage for me," said Pansy, very lucidly.

There was something brilliant in her lucidity, and it made Isabel draw a long breath. It relieved her of a heavy responsibility. Pansy had a sufficient illumination of her own, and

Isabel felt that she herself just now had no light to spare from her small stock. Nevertheless it still clung to her that she must be loyal to Osmond, that she was on her honour in dealing with his daughter. Under the influence of this sentiment she threw out another suggestion before she retired—a suggestion with which it seemed to her that she should have done her utmost. "Your father takes for granted at least that you would like to marry a nobleman."

Pansy stood in the open doorway; she had drawn back the curtain for Isabel to pass. "I think Mr. Rosier looks like one!" she remarked, very gravely.

CHAPTER XLVI

LORD WARBURTON was not seen in Mrs. Osmond's drawing-room for several days, and Isabel could not fail to observe that her husband said nothing to her about having received a letter from him. She could not fail to observe, either, that Osmond was in a state of expectancy, and that though it was not agreeable to him to betray it, he thought their distinguished friend kept him waiting quite too long. At the end of four days he alluded to his absence.

"What has become of Warburton? What does he mean by treating one like a tradesman with a bill?"

"I know nothing about him," Isabel said. "I saw him last Friday, at the German ball. He told me then that he meant to write to you."

"He has never written to me."

"So I supposed, from your not having told me."

"He's an odd fish," said Osmond, comprehensively. And on Isabel's making no rejoinder, he went on to inquire whether it took his lordship five days to indite a letter. Does he form his words with such difficulty?"

"I don't know," said Isabel. "I have never had a letter from him."

"Never had a letter? I had an idea that you were at one time in intimate correspondence."

Isabel answered that this had not been the case, and let the conversation drop. On the morrow, however, coming into the drawing-room late in the afternoon, her husband took it up again.

"When Lord Warburton told you of his intention of writing, what did you say to him?" he asked.

Isabel hesitated a moment. "I think I told him not to forget it."

"Did you believe there was a danger of that?"

"As you say, he's an odd fish."

"Apparently he has forgotten it," said Osmond. "Be so good as to remind him."

"Should you like me to write to him?" Isabel asked.

"I have no objection whatever."

"You expect too much of me."

"Ah yes, I expect a great deal of you."

"I am afraid I shall disappoint you," said Isabel.

'My expectations have survived a good deal of disappointment."

"Of course I know that. Think how I must have disappointed myself! If you really wish to capture Lord Warburton, you must do it yourself."

For a couple of minutes Osmond answered nothing; then he said—"That won't be easy, with you working against me."

Isabel started; she felt herself beginning to tremble. He had a way of looking at her through half-closed eyelids, as if he were thinking of her but scarcely saw her, which seemed to her to have a wonderfully cruel intention. It appeared to recognise her as a disagreeable necessity of thought, but to ignore her, for the time, as a presence. That was the expression of his eyes now. "I think you accuse me of something very base," she said.

"I accuse you of not being trustworthy. If he doesn't come up to the mark it will be because you have kept him off. I don't know that it's base; it is the kind of thing a woman always thinks she may do. I have no doubt you have the finest ideas about it."

"I told you I would do what I could," said Isabel.

"Yes, that gained you time."

It came over Isabel, after he had said this, that she had once thought him beautiful. "How much you must wish to capture him!" she exclaimed, in a moment.

She had no sooner spoken than she perceived the full reach of her words, of which she had not been conscious in uttering them. They made a comparison between Osmond and herself, recalled the fact that she had once held this coveted treasure in her hand and felt herself rich enough to let it fall. A momentary exultation took possession of her—a horrible delight in having wounded him; for his face instantly told her that none of the force of her exclamation was lost.

Osmond expressed nothing otherwise, however; he only said, quickly, "Yes, I wish it very much."

At this moment a servant came in, as if to usher a visitor, and he was followed the next by Lord Warburton, who received a visible check on seeing Osmond. He looked rapidly from the master of the house to the mistress; a movement that seemed to denote a reluctance to interrupt or even a perception of ominous conditions. Then he advanced, with his English address, in which a vague shyness seemed to offer itself as an element of good-breeding; in which the only defect was a difficulty in achieving transitions.

Osmond was embarrassed; he found nothing to say; but Isabel remarked, promptly enough, that they had been in the act of talking about their visitor. Upon this her husband added that they hadn't known what was become of him —they had been afraid he had gone away.

"No," said Lord Warburton, smiling and looking at Osmond; "I am only on the point of going." And then he explained that he found himself suddenly recalled to England; he should start on the morrow or next day. "I am awfully sorry to leave poor Touchett!" he ended by exclaiming.

For a moment neither of his companions spoke; Osmond only leaned back in his chair, listening. Isabel didn't look at him; she could only fancy how he looked. Her eyes were upon Lord Warburton's face, where they were the more free to rest in that those of his lordship carefully avoided them. Yet Isabel was sure that had she met her visitor's glance, she should have found it expressive. "You had better take poor Touchett with you," she heard her husband say, lightly enough, in a moment.

"He had better wait for warmer weather," Lord Warburton answered. "I shouldn't advise him to travel just now."

He sat there for a quarter of an hour, talking as if he might not see them again—unless indeed they should come to England, a course which he strongly recommended. Why shouldn't they come to England in the autumn? that struck him as a very happy thought. It would give him such pleasure to do what he could for them—to have them come and spend a month with him. Osmond, by his own admission, had been to England but once; which was an absurd state

of things. It was just the country for him—he would be sure to get on well there. Then Lord Warburton asked Isabel if she remembered what a good time she had there, and if she didn't want to try it again. Didn't she want to see Gardencourt once more? Gardencourt was really very good. Touchett didn't take proper care of it, but it was the sort of place you could hardly spoil by letting it alone. Why didn't they come and pay Touchett a visit? He surely must have asked them. Hadn't asked them? What an ill-mannered wretch! and Lord Warburton promised to give the master of Gardencourt a piece of his mind. Of course it was a mere accident; he would be delighted to have them. Spending a month with Touchett and a month with himself, and seeing all the rest of the people they must know there, they really wouldn't find it half bad. Lord Warburton added that it would amuse Miss Osmond as well, who had told him that she had never been to England and whom he had assured it was a country she deserved to see. Of course she didn't need to go to England to be admired—that was her fate everywhere; but she would be immensely liked in England, Miss Osmond would, if that was any inducement. He asked if she were not at home: couldn't he say good-bye? Not that he liked good-byes—he always funked them. When he left England the other day he had not said good-bye to any one. He had had half a mind to leave Rome without troubling Mrs. Osmond for a final interview. What could be more dreary than a final interview? One never said the things one wanted to—one remembered them all an hour afterwards. On the other hand, one usually said a lot of things one shouldn't, simply from a sense that one had to say something. Such a sense was bewildering; it made one nervous. He had it at present, and that was the effect it produced on him. If Mrs. Osmond didn't think he spoke as he ought, she must set it down to agitation; it was no light thing to part with Mrs. Osmond. He was really very sorry to be going. He had thought of writing to her, instead of calling—but he would write to her at any rate, to tell her a lot of things that would be sure to occur to him as soon as he had left the house. They must think seriously about coming to Lockleigh.

If there was anything awkward in the circumstances of his visit or in the announcement of his departure, it failed to come to the surface. Lord Warburton talked about his agitation; but he showed it in no other manner, and Isabel saw that since he had determined on a retreat he was capable of executing it gallantly. She was very glad for him; she liked him quite well enough to wish him to appear to carry a thing off. He would do that on any occasion; not from imprudence, but simply from the habit of success; and Isabel perceived that it was not in her husband's power to frustrate this faculty. A double operation, as she sat there, went on in her mind. On one side she listened to Lord Warburton; said what was proper to him; read, more or less, between the lines of what he said himself; and wondered how he would have spoken if he had found her alone. On the other she had a perfect consciousness of Osmond's emotion. She felt almost sorry for him; he was condemned to the sharp pain of loss without the relief of cursing. He had had a great hope, and now, as he saw it vanish into smoke, he was obliged to sit and smile and twirl his thumbs. Not that he troubled himself to smile very brightly; he treated Lord Warburton, on the whole, to as vacant a countenance as so clever a man could very well wear. It was indeed a part of Osmond's cleverness that he could look consummately uncompromised His present appearance, however, was not a confession of disappointment; it was simply a part of Osmond's habitual system, which was to be inexpressive exactly in proportion as he was really intent. He had been intent upon Lord Warburton from the first; but he had never allowed his eagerness to irradiate his refined face. He had treated his possible son-in-law as he treated every one—with an air of being interested in him only for his own advantage, not for Gilbert Osmond's. He would give no sign now of an inward rage which was the result of a vanished prospect of gain—not the faintest nor subtlest. Isabel could be sure of that, if it was any satisfaction to her. Strangely, very strangely, it was a satisfaction; she wished Lord Warburton to triumph before her husband, and at the same time she wished her husband to be very superior before Lord Warburton. Osmond, in his way, was admirable; he had,

like their visitor, the advantage of an acquired habit. It was not that of succeeding, but it was something almost as good—that of not attempting. As he leaned back in his place, listening but vaguely to Lord Warburton's friendly offers and suppressed explanations—as if it were only proper to assume that they were addressed essentially to his wife—he had at least (since so little else was left him) the comfort of thinking how well he personally had kept out of it, and how the air of indifference, which he was now able to wear, had the added beauty of consistency. It was something to be able to look as if their visitor's movements had no relation to his own mind. Their visitor did well, certainly; but Osmond's performance was in its very nature more finished. Lord Warburton's position was after all an easy one; there was no reason in the world why he should not leave Rome. He had beneficent inclinations; but they had stopped short of fruition; he had never committed himself, and his honour was safe. Osmond appeared to take but a moderate interest in the proposal that they should go and stay with him, and in his allusion to the success Pansy might extract from their visit. He murmured a recognition, but left Isabel to say that it was a matter requiring grave consideration. Isabel, even while she made this remark, could see the great vista which had suddenly opened out in her husband's mind, with Pansy's little figure marching up the middle of it.

Lord Warburton had asked leave to bid good-bye to Pansy, but neither Isabel nor Osmond had made any motion to send for her. He had the air of giving out that his visit must be short; he sat on a small chair, as if it were only for a moment, keeping his hat in his hand. But he stayed and stayed; Isabel wondered what he was waiting for. She believed it was not to see Pansy; she had an impression that on the whole he would rather not see Pansy. It was of course to see herself alone—he had something to say to her. Isabel had no great wish to hear it, for she was afraid it would be an explanation, and she could perfectly dispense with explanations. Osmond, however, presently got up, like a man of good taste to whom it had occurred that so inveterate a visitor might wish to say just the last word of all to the ladies.

"I have a letter to write before dinner," he said; "you must excuse me. I will see if my daughter is disengaged, and if she is she shall know you are here. Of course when you come to Rome you will always look us up. Isabel will talk to you about the English expedition; she decides all those things."

The nod with which, instead of a hand-shake, he terminated this little speech, was perhaps a rather meagre form of salutation; but on the whole it was all the occasion demanded. Isabel reflected that after he left the room Lord Warburton would have no pretext for saying—"Your husband is very angry;" which would have been extremely disagreeable to her. Nevertheless, if he had done so, she would have said—"Oh, don't be anxious. He doesn't hate *you:* it's me that he hates!"

It was only when they had been left alone together that Lord Warburton showed a certain vague awkwardness—sitting down in another chair, handling two or three ot the objects that were near him. "I hope he will make Miss Osmond come," he presently remarked. "I want very much to see her."

"I'm glad it's the last time," said Isabel.

"So am I. She doesn't care for me."

"No, she doesn't care for you."

"I don't wonder at it," said Lord Warburton. Then he added, with inconsequence—"You will come to England, won't you?"

"I think we had better not."

"Ah you owe me a visit. Don't you remember that you were to have come to Lockleigh once, and you never did?"

"Everything is changed since then," said Isabel.

"Not changed for the worse, surely—as far as we are concerned. To see you under my roof"—and he hesitated a moment—"would be a great satisfaction."

She had feared an explanation; but that was the only one that occurred. They talked a little of Ralph, and in another moment Pansy came in, already dressed for dinner and with a little red spot in either cheek. She shook hands with Lord Warburton and stood looking up into his face with a fixed

smile—a smile that Isabel knew, though his lordship probably never suspected it, to be near akin to a burst of tears.

"I am going away," he said. "I want to bid you good-bye."

"Good-bye, Lord Warburton." The young girl's voice trembled a little.

"And I want to tell you how much I wish you may be very happy."

"Thank you, Lord Warburton," Pansy answered.

He lingered a moment, and gave a glance at Isabel. "You ought to be very happy—you have got a guardian angel."

"I am sure I shall be happy," said Pansy, in the tone of a person whose certainties were always cheerful.

"Such a conviction as that will take you a great way. But if it should ever fail you, remember—remember—" and Lord Warburton stammered a little. "Think of me sometimes, you know," he said with a vague laugh. Then he shook hands with Isabel, in silence, and presently he was gone.

When he had left the room Isabel expected an effusion of tears from her step-daughter; but Pansy in fact treated her to something very different.

"I think you *are* my guardian angel!" she exclaimed, very sweetly.

Isabel shook her head. "I am not an angel of any kind. I am at the most your good friend."

"You are a very good friend then—to have asked papa to be gentle with me."

"I have asked your father nothing," said Isabel, wondering.

"He told me just now to come to the drawing-room, and then he gave me a very kind kiss."

"Ah," said Isabel, "that was quite his own idea!"

She recognised the idea perfectly; it was very characteristic, and she was to see a great deal more of it. Even with Pansy, Osmond could not put himself the least in the wrong. They were dining out that day, and after their dinner they went to another entertainment; so that it was not till late in the evening that Isabel saw him alone. When Pansy kissed him, before going to bed, he returned her embrace with even more than his usual munificence, and Isabel wondered whether he meant it as a hint that his daughter had

been injured by the machinations of her stepmother. It was a partial expression, at any rate, of what he continued to expect of his wife. Isabel was about to follow Pansy, but he remarked that he wished she would remain; he had something to say to her. Then he walked about the drawing-room a little, while she stood waiting, in her cloak.

"I don't understand what you wish to do," he said in a moment. "I should like to know—so that I may know how to act."

"Just now I wish to go to bed. I am very tired."

"Sit down and rest; I shall not keep you long. Not there—take a comfortable place." And he arranged a multitude of cushions that were scattered in picturesque disorder upon a vast divan. This was not, however, where she seated herself; she dropped into the nearest chair. The fire had gone out; the lights in the great room were few. She drew her cloak about her; she felt mortally cold. "I think you are trying to humiliate me," Osmond went on. "It's a most absurd undertaking."

"I haven't the least idea what you mean," said Isabel.

"You have played a very deep game; you have managed it beautifully."

"What is it that I have managed?"

"You have not quite settled it, however; we shall see him again." And he stopped in front of her, with his hands in his pockets, looking down at her thoughtfully, in his usual way, which seemed meant to let her know that she was not an object, but only a rather disagreeable incident, of thought.

"If you mean that Lord Warburton is under an obligation to come back, you are wrong," Isabel said. "He is under none whatever."

"That's just what I complain of. But when I say he will come back, I don't mean that he will come from a sense of duty."

"There is nothing else to make him. I think he has quite exhausted Rome."

"Ah no, that's a shallow judgment. Rome is inexhaustible." And Osmond began to walk about again. "However, about that, perhaps, there is no hurry," he added. "It's rather a good idea of his that we should go to England. If it were

not for the fear of finding your cousin there, I think I should try to persuade you."

"It may be that you will not find my cousin," said Isabel.

"I should like to be sure of it. However, I shall be as sure as possible. At the same time I should like to see his house, that you told me so much about at one time: what do you call it?—Gardencourt. It must be a charming thing. And then, you know, I have a devotion to the memory of your uncle; you made me take a great fancy to him. I should like to see where he lived and died. That, however, is a detail. Your friend was right; Pansy ought to see England."

"I have no doubt she would enjoy it," said Isabel.

"But that's a long time hence; next autumn is far off," Osmond continued; "and meantime there are things that more nearly interest us. Do you think me so very proud?" he asked, suddenly.

"I think you very strange."

"You don't understand me."

"No, not even when you insult me."

"I don't insult you; I am incapable of it. I merely speak of certain facts, and if the allusion is an injury to you the fault is not mine. It is surely a fact that you have kept all this matter quite in your own hands."

"Are you going back to Lord Warburton?" Isabel asked. "I am very tired of his name."

"You shall hear it again before we have done with it."

She had spoken of his insulting her, but it suddenly seemed to her that this ceased to be a pain. He was going down—down; the vision of such a fall made her almost giddy; that was the only pain. He was too strange, too different; he didn't touch her. Still, the working of his morbid passion was extraordinary, and she felt a rising curiosity to know in what light he saw himself justified. "I might say to you that I judge you have nothing to say to me that is worth hearing," she rejoined in a moment. "But I should perhaps be wrong. There is a thing that would be worth my hearing—to know in the plainest words of what it is you accuse me."

"Of preventing Pansy's marriage to Warburton. Are those words plain enough?"

"On the contrary, I took a great interest in it. I told you so; and when you told me that you counted on me—that I think was what you said—I accepted the obligation. I was a fool to do so, but I did it."

"You pretended to do it, and you even pretended reluctance to make me more willing to trust you. Then you began to use your ingenuity to get him out of the way."

"I think I see what you mean," said Isabel.

"Where is the letter that you told me he had written me?" her husband asked.

"I haven't the least idea; I haven't asked him."

"You stopped it on the way," said Osmond.

Isabel slowly got up; standing there, in her white cloak, which covered her to her feet, she might have represented the angel of disdain, first cousin to that of pity. "Oh, Osmond, for a man who was so fine!" she exclaimed, in a long murmur.

"I was never so fine as you! You have done everything you wanted. You have got him out of the way without appearing to do so, and you have placed me in the position in which you wished to see me—that of a man who tried to marry his daughter to a lord, but didn't succeed."

"Pansy doesn't care for him; she is very glad he is gone," said Isabel.

"That has nothing to do with the matter."

"And he doesn't care for Pansy."

"That won't do; you told me he did. I don't know why you wanted this particular satisfaction," Osmond continued; "you might have taken some other. It doesn't seem to me that I have been presumptuous—that I have taken too much for granted. I have been very modest about it, very quiet. The idea didn't originate with me. He began to show that he liked her before I ever thought of it. I left it all to you."

"Yes, you were very glad to leave it to me. After this you must attend to such things yourself."

He looked at her a moment, and then he turned away. "I thought you were very fond of my daughter."

"I have never been more so than to-day."

"Your affection is attended with immense limitations. However, that perhaps is natural."

"Is this all you wished to say to me?" Isabel asked, taking a candle that stood on one of the tables.

"Are you satisfied? Am I sufficiently disappointed?"

"I don't think that on the whole you are disappointed. You have had another opportunity to try to bewilder me."

"It's not that. It's proved that Pansy can aim high."

"Poor little Pansy!" said Isabel, turning away with her candle.

CHAPTER XLVII

IT was from Henrietta Stackpole that she learned that Caspar Goodwood had come to Rome; an event that took place three days after Lord Warburton's departure. This latter event had been preceded by an incident of some importance to Isabel—the temporary absence, once again, of Madame Merle, who had gone to Naples to stay with a friend, the happy possessor of a villa at Posilippo. Madame Merle had ceased to minister to Isabel's happiness, who found herself wondering whether the most discreet of women might not also by chance be the most dangerous. Sometimes, at night, she had strange visions; she seemed to see her husband and Madame Merle in dim, indistinguishable combination. It seemed to her that she had not done with her; this lady had something in reserve. Isabel's imagination applied itself actively to this elusive point, but every now and then it was checked by a nameless dread, so that when her brilliant friend was away from Rome she had almost a consciousness of respite. She had already learned from Miss Stackpole that Caspar Goodwood was in Europe, Henrietta having written to inform her of this fact immediately after meeting him in Paris. He himself never wrote to Isabel, and though he was in Europe she thought it very possible he might not desire to see her. Their last interview, before her marriage, had had quite the character of a complete rupture; if she remembered rightly he had said he wished to take his last look at her. Since then he had been the most inharmonious survival of her earlier time—the only one, in fact, with which a permanent pain was associated. He left her, that morning, with the sense of an unnecessary shock; it was like a collision between vessels in broad daylight. There had been no mist, no hidden current to excuse it, and she herself had only wished to steer skilfully. He had bumped against her prow, however, while her hand was on the tiller, and—to complete the metaphor—had given the

lighter vessel a strain which still occasionally betrayed itself in a faint creaking. It had been painful to see him, because he represented the only serious harm that (to her belief) she had ever done in the world; he was the only person with an unsatisfied claim upon her. She had made him unhappy, she couldn't help it; and his unhappiness was a great reality. She cried with rage, after he had left her, at—she hardly knew what: she tried to think it was at his want of consideration. He had come to her with his unhappiness when her own bliss was so perfect; he had done his best to darken the brightness of these pure rays. He had not been violent, and yet there was a violence in that. There was a violence at any rate in something, somewhere; perhaps it was only in her own fit of weeping and that after-sense of it which lasted for three or four days. The effect of Caspar Goodwood's visit faded away, and during the first year of Isabel's marriage he dropped out of her books. He was a thankless subject of reference; it was disagreeable to have to think of a person who was unhappy on your account and whom you could do nothing to relieve. It would have been different if she had been able to doubt, even a little, of his unhappiness, as she doubted of Lord Warburton's; unfortunately it was beyond question, and this aggressive, uncompromising look of it was just what made it unattractive. She could never say to herself that Caspar Goodwood had great compensations, as she was able to say in the case of her English suitor. She had no faith in his compensations, and no esteem for them. A cotton-factory was not a compensation for anything—least of all for having failed to marry Isabel Archer. And yet, beyond that, she hardly knew what he had—save of course his intrinsic qualities. Oh, he was intrinsic enough; she never thought of his even looking for artificial aids. If he extended his business—that, to the best of her belief, was the only form exertion could take with him—it would be because it was an enterprising thing, or good for the business; not in the least because he might hope it would overlay the past. This gave his figure a kind of bareness and bleakness which made the accident of meeting it in one's meditations always a sort of shock; it was deficient in the social drapery which muffles the sharpness

of human contact. His perfect silence, moreover, the fact that she never heard from him and very seldom heard any mention of him, deepened this impression of his loneliness. She asked Lily for news of him, from time to time; but Lily knew nothing about Boston; her imagination was confined within the limits of Manhattan. As time went on Isabel thought of him oftener, and with fewer restrictions; she had more than once the idea of writing to him. She had never told her husband about him—never let Osmond know of his visits to her in Florence; a reserve not dictated in the early period by a want of confidence in Osmond, but simply by the consideration that Caspar Goodwood's disappointment was not her secret but his own. It would be wrong of her, she believed, to convey it to another, and Mr. Goodwood's affairs could have, after all, but little interest for Gilbert.

When it came to the point she never wrote to him; it seemed to her that, considering his grievance, the least she could do was to let him alone. Nevertheless she would have been glad to be in some way nearer to him. It was not that it ever occurred to her that she might have married him; even after the consequences of her marriage became vivid to her, that particular reflection, though she indulged in so many, had not the assurance to present itself. But when she found herself in trouble he became a member of that circle of things with which she wished to set herself right. I have related how passionately she desired to feel that her unhappiness should not have come to her through her own fault. She had no near prospect of dying, and yet she wished to make her peace with the world—to put her spiritual affairs in order. It came back to her from time to time that there was an account still to be settled with Caspar Goodwood; it seemed to her that she would settle it to-day on terms easy for him. Still, when she learned that he was coming to Rome she felt afraid; it would be more disagreeable for him than for any one else to learn that she was unhappy. Deep in her breast she believed that he had invested all his in her happiness, while the others had invested only a part. He was one more person from whom she should have to conceal her misery. She was reassured, however, after he arrived

in Rome, for he spent several days without coming to see her.

Henrietta Stackpole, it may well be imagined, was much more punctual, and Isabel was largely favoured with the society of her friend. She threw herself into it, for now that she had made such a point of keeping her conscience clear, that was one way of proving that she had not been superficial—the more so that the years, in their flight, had rather enriched than blighted those peculiarities which had been humorously criticised by persons less interested than Isabel and were striking enough to give friendship a spice of heroism. Henrietta was as keen and quick and fresh as ever, and as neat and bright and fair. Her eye had lost none of its serenity, her toilet none of its crispness, her opinions none of their national flavour. She was by no means quite unchanged, however; it seemed to Isabel that she had grown restless. Of old she had never been restless; though she was perpetually in motion it was impossible to be more deliberate. She had a reason for everything she did; she fairly bristled with motives. Formerly, when she came to Europe it was because she wished to see it, but now, having already seen it she had no such excuse. She did not for a moment pretend that the desire to examine decaying civilisations had anything to do with her present enterprise; her journey was rather an expression of her independence of the old world than of a sense of further obligations to it. "It's nothing to come to Europe," she said to Isabel; "it doesn't seem to me one needs so many reasons for that. It is something to stay at home; this is much more important." It was not therefore with a sense of doing anything very important that she treated herself to another pilgrimage to Rome; she had seen the place before and carefully inspected it; the actual episode was simply a sign of familiarity, of one's knowing all about it, of one's having as good a right as any one else to be there. This was all very well, and Henrietta was restless; she had a perfect right to be restless, too, if one came to that. But she had after all a better reason for coming to Rome than that she cared for it so little. Isabel easily recognized it, and with it the worth of her friend's fidelity. She had crossed the stormy ocean in midwinter because she

guessed that Isabel was sad. Henrietta guessed a great deal, but she had never guessed so happily as that. Isabel's satisfactions just now were few, but even if they had been more numerous, there would still have been something of individual joy in her sense of being justified in having always thought highly of Henrietta. She had made large concessions with regard to her, but she had insisted that, with all abatements, she was very valuable. It was not her own triumph, however, that Isabel found good; it was simply the relief of confessing to Henrietta, the first person to whom she had owned it, that she was not contented. Henrietta had herself approached this point with the smallest possible delay, and had accused her to her face of being miserable. She was a woman, she was a sister; she was not Ralph, nor Lord Warburton, nor Caspar Goodwood, and Isabel could speak.

"Yes, I am miserable," she said, very gently. She hated to hear herself say it; she tried to say it as judicially as possible.

"What does he do to you?" Henrietta asked, frowning as if she were inquiring into the operations of a quack doctor.

"He does nothing. But he doesn't like me."

"He's very difficult!" cried Miss Stackpole. "Why don't you leave him?"

"I can't change, that way," Isabel said.

"Why not, I should like to know? You won't confess that you have made a mistake. You are too proud."

"I don't know whether I am too proud. But I can't publish my mistake. I don't think that's decent. I would much rather die."

"You won't think so always," said Henrietta.

"I don't know what great unhappiness might bring me to; but it seems to me I shall always be ashamed. One must accept one's deeds. I married him before all the world; I was perfectly free; it was impossible to do anything more deliberate. One can't change, that way," Isabel repeated.

"You have changed, in spite of the impossibility. I hope you don't mean to say that you like him."

Isabel hesitated a moment. "No, I don't like him. I can tell you, because I am weary of my secret. But that's enough; I can't tell all the world."

Henrietta gave a rich laugh. "Don't you think you are rather too considerate?"

"It's not of him that I am considerate—it's of myself!" Isabel answered.

It was not surprising that Gilbert Osmond should not have taken comfort in Miss Stackpole; his instinct had naturally set him in opposition to a young lady capable of advising his wife to withdraw from the conjugal mansion. When she arrived in Rome he said to Isabel that he hoped she would leave her friend the interviewer, alone; and Isabel answered that he at least had nothing to fear from her. She said to Henrietta that as Osmond didn't like her she could not invite her to dine; but they could easily see each other in other ways. Isabel received Miss Stackpole freely in her own sitting-room, and took her repeatedly to drive, face to face with Pansy, who, bending a little forward, on the opposite seat of the carriage, gazed at the celebrated authoress with a respectful attention which Henrietta occasionally found irritating. She complained to Isabel that Miss Osmond had a little look as if she should remember everything one said. "I don't want to be remembered that way," Miss Stackpole declared; "I consider that my conversation refers only to the moment, like the morning papers. Your step-daughter, as she sits there, looks as if she kept all the back numbers and would bring them out some day against me." She could not bring herself to think favourably of Pansy, whose absence of initiative, of conversation, of personal claims, seemed to her, in a girl of twenty, unnatural and even sinister. Isabel presently saw that Osmond would have liked her to urge a little the cause of her friend, insist a little upon his receiving her, so that he might appear to suffer for good manners' sake. Her immediate acceptance of his objections put him too much in the wrong—it being in effect one of the disadvantages of expressing contempt, that you cannot enjoy at the same time the credit of expressing sympathy. Osmond held to his credit, and yet he held to his objections—all of which were elements difficult to reconcile. The right thing would have been that Miss Stackpole should come to dine at the Palazzo Roccanera once or twice, so that (in spite of his superficial civility, always so great) she might judge for herself how

little pleasure it gave him. From the moment, however, that both the ladies were so unaccommodating, there was nothing for Osmond but to wish that Henrietta would take herself off. It was surprising how little satisfaction he got from his wife's friends; he took occasion to call Isabel's attention to it.

"You are certainly not fortunate in your intimates; I wish you might make a new collection," he said to her one morning, in reference to nothing visible at the moment, but in a tone of ripe reflection which deprived the remark of all brutal abruptness. "It's as if you had taken the trouble to pick out the people in the world that I have least in common with. Your cousin I have always thought a conceited ass—besides his being the most ill-favoured animal I know. Then it's insufferably tiresome that one can't tell him so; one must spare him on account of his health. His health seems to me the best part of him; it gives him privileges enjoyed by no one else. If he is so desperately ill there is only one way to prove it; but he seems to have no mind for that. I can't say much more for the great Warburton. When one really thinks of it, the cool insolence of that performance was something rare! He comes and looks at one's daughter as if she were a suite of apartments; he tries the door-handles and looks out of the windows, raps on the walls and almost thinks he will take the place. Will you be so good as to draw up a lease? Then, on the whole, he decides that the rooms are too small; he doesn't think he could live on a third floor; he must look out for a *piano nobile*. And he goes away, after having got a month's lodging in the poor little apartment for nothing. Miss Stackpole, however, is your most wonderful invention. She strikes me as a kind of monster. One hasn't a nerve in one's body that she doesn't set quivering. You know I never have admitted that she is a woman. Do you know what she reminds me of? Of a new steel pen—the most odious thing in nature. She talks as a steel pen writes; aren't her letters, by the way, on ruled paper? She thinks and moves, and walks and looks, exactly as she talks. You may say that she doesn't hurt me, inasmuch as I don't see her. I don't see her, but I hear her; I hear her all day long. Her voice is in my ears; I can't get rid of it. I know

exactly what she says, and every inflection of the tone in which says it. She says charming things about me, and they give you great comfort. I don't like at all to think she talks about me—I feel as I should feel if I knew the footman were wearing my hat!"

Henrietta talked about Gilbert Osmond, as his wife assured him, rather less than he suspected. She had plenty of other subjects, in two of which the reader may be supposed to be especially interested. She let Isabel know that Caspar Goodwood had discovered for himself that she was unhappy, though indeed her ingenuity was unable to suggest what comfort he hoped to give her by coming to Rome and yet not calling on her. They met him twice in the street, but he had no appearance of seeing them; they were driving, and he had a habit of looking straight in front of him, as if he proposed to contemplate but one object at a time. Isabel could have fancied she had seen him the day before; it must have been with just that face and step that he walked out of Mrs. Touchett's door at the close of their last interview. He was dressed just as he had been dressed on that day; Isabel remembered the colour of his cravat; and yet in spite of this familiar look there was a strangeness in his figure too; something that made her feel afresh that it was rather terrible he should have come to Rome. He looked bigger and more over-topping than of old, and in those days he certainly was lofty enough. She noticed that the people whom he passed looked back after him; but he went straight forward, lifting above them a face like a February sky.

Miss Stackpole's other topic was very different; she gave Isabel the latest news about Mr. Bantling. He had been out in the United States the year before, and she was happy to say she had been able to show him considerable attention. She didn't know how much he had enjoyed it, but she would undertake to say it had done him good; he wasn't the same man when he left that he was when he came. It had opened his eyes and shown him that England was not everything. He was very much liked over there, and thought extremely simple—more simple than the English were commonly supposed to be. There were some people thought him affected;

she didn't know whether they meant that his simplicity was an affectation. Some of his questions were too discouraging; he thought all the chamber-maids were farmers' daughters —or all the farmers' daughters were chamber-maids—she couldn't exactly remember which. He hadn't seemed able to grasp the school-system; it seemed really too much for him. On the whole he had appeared as if there were too much —as if he could only take a small part. The part he had chosen was the hotel-system, and the river-navigation. He seemed really fascinated with the hotels; he had a photograph of every one he had visited. But the river-steamers were his principal interest; he wanted to do nothing but sail on the big boats. They had travelled together from New York to Milwaukee, stopping at the most interesting cities on the route; and whenever they started afresh he had wanted to know if they could go by the steamer. He seemed to have no idea of geography—had an impression that Baltimore was a western city, and was perpetually expecting to arrive at the Mississippi. He appeared never to have heard of any river in America but the Mississippi, and was unprepared to recognise the existence of the Hudson, though he was obliged to confess at last that it was fully equal to the Rhine. They had spent some pleasant hours in the palace-cars; he was always ordering ice-cream from the coloured man. He could never get used to that idea—that you could get ice-cream in the cars. Of course you couldn't, nor fans, nor candy, nor anything in the English cars! He found the heat quite overwhelming, and she had told him that she expected it was the greatest he had ever experienced. He was now in England, hunting—"hunting round," Henrietta called it. These amusements were those of the American red men; we had left that behind long ago, the pleasures of the chase. It seemed to be generally believed in England that we wore tomahawks and feathers; but such a costume was more in keeping with English habits. Mr. Bantling would not have time to join her in Italy, but when she should go to Paris again he expected to come over. He wanted very much to see Versailles again; he was very fond of the ancient *régime*. They didn't agree about that, but that was what she liked Versailles for, that you could see the ancient *régime*

had been swept away. There were no dukes and marquises there now; on the contrary, she remembered one day when there were five American families, all walking round. Mr. Bantling was very anxious that she take up the subject of England again, and he thought she might get on better with it now; England had changed a good deal within two or three years. He was determined that if she went there he should go to see his sister, Lady Pensil, and that this time the invitation should come to her straight. The mystery of that other one had never been explained.

Caspar Goodwood came at last to the Palazzo Roccanera; he had written Isabel a note beforehand, to ask leave. This was promptly granted; she would be at home at six o'clock that afternoon. She spent the day wondering what he was coming for—what good he expected to get of it. He had presented himself hitherto as a person destitute of the faculty of compromise, who would take what he had asked for or nothing. Isabel's hospitality, however, asked no questions, and she found no great difficulty in appearing happy enough to deceive him. It was her conviction, at least, that she deceived him, and made him say to himself that he had been misinformed. But she also saw, so she believed, that he was not disappointed, as some other men, she was sure, would have been; he had not come to Rome to look for an opportunity. She never found out what he had come for; he offered her no explanation; there could be none but the very simple one that he wanted to see her. In other words, he had come for his amusement. Isabel followed up this induction with a good deal of eagerness, and was delighted to have found a formula that would lay the ghost of this gentleman's ancient grievance. If he had come to Rome for his amusement this was exactly what she wanted; for if he cared for amusement he had got over his heartache. If he had got over his heartache everything was as it should be, and her responsibilities were at an end. It was true that he took his recreation a little stiffly, but he had never been demonstrative, and Isabel had every reason to believe that he was satisfied with what he saw. Henrietta was not in his confidence, though he was in hers, and Isabel consequently received no side-light upon his state

of mind. He had little conversation upon general topics; it came back to her that she had said of him once, years before—"Mr. Goodwood speaks a good deal, but he doesn't talk." He spoke a good deal in Rome, but he talked, perhaps, as little as ever; considering, that is, how much there was to talk about. His arrival was not calculated to simplify her relations with her husband, for if Mr. Osmond didn't like her friends, Mr. Goodwood had no claim upon his attention save having been one of the first of them. There was nothing for her to say of him but that he was an old friend; this rather meagre synthesis exhausted the facts. She had been obliged to introduce him to Osmond; it was impossible she should not ask him to dinner, to her Thursday evenings, of which she had grown very weary, but to which her husband still held for the sake not so much of inviting people as of not inviting them. To the Thursdays Mr. Goodwood came regularly, solemnly, rather early; he appeared to regard them with a good deal of gravity. Isabel every now and then had a moment of anger; there was something so literal about him; she thought he might know that she didn't know what to do with him. But she couldn't call him stupid; he was not that in the least; he was only extraordinarily honest. To be as honest as that made a man very different from most people; one had to be almost equally honest with him. Isabel made this latter reflection at the very time she was flattering herself that she had persuaded him that she was the most light-hearted of women. He never threw any doubt on this point, never asked her any personal questions. He got on much better with Osmond than had seemed probable. Osmond had a great dislike to being counted upon; in such a case he had an irresistible need of disappointing you. It was in virtue of this principle that he gave himself the entertainment of taking a fancy to a perpendicular Bostonian whom he had been depended upon to treat with coldness. He asked Isabel if Mr. Goodwood also had wanted to marry her, and expressed surprise at her not having accepted him. It would have been an excellent thing, like living under a tall belfry which would strike all the hours and make a queer vibration in the upper air. He declared he liked to talk

with the great Goodwood; it wasn't easy at first, you had to climb up an interminable steep staircase up to the top of the tower; but when you got there you had a big view and felt a little fresh breeze. Osmond, as we know, had delightful qualities, and he gave Caspar Goodwood the benefit of them all. Isabel could see that Mr. Goodwood thought better of her husband than he had ever wished to; he had given her the impression that morning in Florence of being inaccessible to a good impression. Osmond asked him repeatedly to dinner, and Goodwood smoked a cigar with him afterwards, and even desired to be shown his collections. Osmond said to Isabel that he was very original; he was as strong as an English portmanteau. Caspar Goodwood took to riding on the Campagna, and devoted much time to this exercise; it was therefore mainly in the evening that Isabel saw him. She bethought herself of saying to him one day that if he were willing he could render her a service. And then she added smiling—

"I don't know, however, what right I have to ask a service of you."

"You are the person in the world who has most right," he answered. "I have given you assurances that I have never given any one else."

The service was that he should go and see her cousin Ralph, who was ill at the Hôtel de Paris, alone, and he be as kind to him as possible. Mr. Goodwood had never seen him, but he would know who the poor fellow was; if she was not mistaken, Ralph had once invited him to Gardencourt. Caspar remember the invitation perfectly, and, though he was not supposed to be a man of imagination, had enough to put himself in the place of a poor gentleman who lay dying at a Roman inn. He called at the Hôtel de Paris, and on being shown into the presence of the master of Gardencourt, found Miss Stackpole sitting beside his sofa. A singular change had, in fact, occurred in this lady's relations with Ralph Touchett. She had not been asked by Isabel to go and see him, but on hearing that he was too ill to come out had immediately gone of her own motion. After this she had paid him a daily visit—always under the conviction that they were great enemies. "Oh yes, we are inti-

mate enemies," Ralph used to say; and he accused her freely —as freely as the humour of it would allow—of coming to worry him to death. In reality they became excellent friends, and Henrietta wondered that she should never have liked him before. Ralph liked her exactly as much as he had always done; he had never doubted for a moment that she was an excellent fellow. They talked about everything, and always differed; about everything, that is, but Isabel —a topic as to which Ralph always had a thin forefinger on his lips. On the other hand, Mr. Bantling was a great resource; Ralph was capable of discussing Mr. Bantling with Henrietta for hours. Discussion was stimulated of course by their inevitable difference of view—Ralph having amused himself with taking the ground that the genial ex-guardsman was a regular Machiavelli. Caspar Goodwood could contribute nothing to such a debate; but after he had been left alone with Touchett, he found there were various other matters they could talk about. It must be admitted that the lady who had just gone out was not one of these; Caspar granted all Miss Stackpole's merits in advance, but had no further remark to make about her. Neither, after the first allusions, did the two men expatiate upon Mrs. Osmond —a theme in which Goodwood perceived as many dangers as his host. He felt very sorry for Ralph; he couldn't bear to see a pleasant man so helpless. There was help in Goodwood, when once the fountain had been tapped; and he repeated several times his visit to the Hôtel de Paris. It seemed to Isabel that she had been very clever; she had disposed of the superfluous Caspar. She had given him an occupation; she had converted him into a care-taker of Ralph. She had a plan of making him travel northward with her cousin as soon as the first mild weather should allow it. Lord Warburton had brought Ralph to Rome, and Mr. Goodwood should take him away. There seemed a happy symmetry in this, and she was now intensely eager that Ralph should leave Rome. She had a constant fear that he would die there, and a horror of this event occurring at an inn, at her door, which she had so rarely entered. Ralph must sink to his last rest in his own dear house, in one of those deep, dim chambers of Gardencourt, where the dark

ivy would cluster round the edges of the glimmering window. There seemed to Isabel in these days something sacred about Gardencourt; no chapter of the past was more perfectly irrecoverable. When she thought of the months she had spent there the tears rose to her eyes. She flattered herself, as I say, upon her ingenuity, but she had need of all she could muster; for several events occurred which seemed to confront and defy her. The Countess Gemini arrived from Florence—arrived with her trunks, her dresses, her chatter, her little fibs, her frivolity, the strange memory of her lovers. Edward Rosier, who had been away somewhere—no one, not even Pansy, knew where—reappeared in Rome and began to write her long letters, which she never answered. Madame Merle returned from Naples and said to her with a strange smile—"What on earth did you do with Lord Warburton?" As if it were any business of hers!

CHAPTER XLVIII

ONE day, toward the end of February, Ralph Touchett made up his mind to return to England. He had his own reasons for this decision, which he was not bound to communicate; but Henrietta Stackpole, to whom he mentioned his intention, flattered herself that she guessed them. She forbore to express them, however; she only said, after a moment, as she sat by his sofa—

"I suppose you know that you can't go alone?"

"I have no idea of doing that," Ralph answered. "I shall have people with me."

"What do you mean by 'people'? Servants, whom you pay?"

"Ah," said Ralph, jocosely, "after all, they are human beings."

"Are there any women among them?" Miss Stackpole inquired, calmly.

"You speak as if I had a dozen! No, I confess I haven't a soubrette in my employment."

"Well," said Henrietta, tranquilly, "you can't go to England that way. You must have a woman's care."

"I have had so much of yours for the past fortnight that it will last me a good while."

"You have not had enough of it yet. I guess I will go with you," said Henrietta.

"Go with me?" Ralph slowly raised himself from his sofa.

"Yes, I know you don't like me, but I will go with you all the same. It would be better for your health to lie down again."

Ralph looked at her a little; then he slowly resumed his former posture.

"I like you very much," he said in a moment.

Miss Stackpole gave one of her infrequent laughs.

"You needn't think that by saying that you can buy me off. I will go with you, and what is more I will take care of you."

"You are a very good woman," said Ralph.

"Wait till I get you safely home before you say that. It won't be easy. But you had better go, all the same."

Before she left him, Ralph said to her—

"Do you really mean to take care of me?"

"Well, I mean to try."

"I notify you, then, that I submit. Oh, I submit!" And it was perhaps a sign of submission that a few minutes after she had left him alone he burst into a loud fit of laughter. It seemed to him so inconsequent, such a conclusive proof of his having abdicated all functions and renounced all exercise, that he should start on a journey across Europe under the supervision of Miss Stackpole. And the great oddity was that the prospect pleased him; he was gratefully, luxuriously passive. He felt even impatient to start; and indeed he had an immense longing to see his own house again. The end of everything was at hand; it seemed to him that he could stretch out his arm and touch the goal. But he wished to die at home; it was the only wish he had left—to extend himself in the large quiet room where he had last seen his father lie, and close his eyes upon the summer dawn,

That same day Caspar Goodwood came to see him, and he informed his visitor that Miss Stackpole had taken him up and was to conduct him back to England.

"Ah then," said Caspar, "I am afraid I shall be a fifth wheel to the coach. Mrs. Osmond has made *me* promise to go with you."

"Good heavens—it's the golden age! You are all too kind."

"The kindness on my part is to her; it's hardly to you."

"Granting that, *she* is kind," said Ralph, smiling.

"To get people to go with you? Yes, that's a sort of kindness," Goodwood answered, without lending himself to the joke. "For myself, however," he added, "I will go so far as to say that I would much rather travel with you and Miss Stackpole than with Miss Stackpole alone."

"And you would rather stay here than do either," said Ralph. "There is really no need of your coming. Henrietta is extraordinarily efficient."

"I am sure of that. But I have promised Mrs. Osmond."

"You can easily get her to let you off."

"She wouldn't let me off for the world. She wants me to look after you, but that isn't the principal thing. The principal thing is that she wants me to leave Rome."

"Ah, you see too much in it," Ralph suggested.

"I bore her," Goodwood went on; "she has nothing to say to me, so she invented that."

"Oh then, if it's a convenience to her, I certainly will take you with me. Though I don't see why it should be a convenience," Ralph added in a moment.

"Well," said Caspar Goodwood, simply, "she thinks I am watching her."

"Watching her?"

"Trying to see whether she's happy."

"That's easy to see," said Ralph. "She's the most visibly happy woman I know."

"Exactly so; I am satisfied," Goodwood answered, dryly. For all his dryness, however, he had more to say. "I have been watching her; I was an old friend, and it seemed to me I had the right. She pretends to be happy; that was what she undertook to be; and I thought I should like to see for myself what it amounts to. I have seen," he continued, in a strange voice, "and I don't want to see any more. I am now quite ready to go."

"Do you know it strikes me as about time you should?" Ralph rejoined. And this was the only conversation these gentlemen had about Isabel Osmond.

Henrietta made her preparations for departure, and among them she found it proper to say a few words to the Countess Gemini, who returned at Miss Stackpole's *pension* the visit which this lady had paid her in Florence.

"You were very wrong about Lord Warburton," she remarked, to the Countess. "I think it is right you should know that."

"About his making love to Isabel? My poor lady, he was at her house three times a day. He has left traces of his passage!" the Countess cried.

"He wished to marry your niece; that's why he came to the house."

The Countess stared, and then gave an inconsiderate laugh.

"Is that the story that Isabel tells? It isn't bad, as such things go. If he wishes to marry my niece, pray why doesn't he do it? Perhaps he has gone to buy the wedding-ring, and will come back with it next month, after I am gone."

"No, he will not come back. Miss Osmond doesn't wish to marry him."

"She is very accommodating! I knew she was fond of Isabel, but I didn't know she carried it so far."

"I don't understand you," said Henrietta, coldly, and reflecting that the Countess was unpleasantly perverse. "I really must stick to my point—that Isabel never encouraged the attentions of Lord Warburton."

"My dear friend, what do you and I know about it? All we know is that my brother is capable of everything."

"I don't know what he is capable of," said Henrietta, with dignity.

"It's not her encouraging Lord Warburton that I complain of; it's her sending him away. I want particularly to see him. Do you suppose she thought I would make him faithless?" the Countess continued, with audacious insistence. "However, she is only keeping him, one can feel that. The house is full of him there; he is quite in the air. Oh yes, he has left traces; I am sure I shall see him yet."

"Well," said Henrietta, after a little, with one of those inspirations which had made the fortune of her letters to the *Interviewer*, "perhaps he will be more successful with you than with Isabel!"

When she told her friend of the offer she had made to Ralph, Isabel replied that she could have done nothing that would have pleased her more. It had always been her faith that, at bottom, Ralph and Henrietta were made to understand each other.

"I don't care whether he understands me or not," said Henrietta. "The great thing is that he shouldn't die in the cars."

"He won't do that," Isabel said, shaking her head, with an extension of faith.

"He won't if I can help it. I see you want us all to go. I don't know what you want to do."

"I want to be alone," said Isabel.

"You won't be that so long as you have got so much company at home."

"Ah, they are part of the comedy. You others are spectators."

"Do you call it a comedy, Isabel Archer?" Henrietta inquired, severely.

"The tragedy, then, if you like. You are all looking at me; it makes me uncomfortable."

Henrietta contemplated her a while.

"You are like the stricken deer, seeking the innermost shade. Oh, you do give me such a sense of helplessness!" she broke out.

"I am not at all helpless. There are many things I mean to do."

"It's not you I am speaking of; it's myself. It's too much, having come on purpose, to leave you just as I find you."

"You don't do that; you leave me much refreshed," Isabel said.

"Very mild refreshment—sour lemonade! I want you to promise me something."

"I can't do that. I shall never make another promise. I made such a solemn one four years ago, and I have succeeded so ill in keeping it."

"You have had no encouragement. In this case I should give you the greatest. Leave your husband before the worst comes; that's what I want you to promise."

"The worst? What do you call the worst?"

"Before your character gets spoiled."

"Do you mean my disposition? It won't get spoiled," Isabel answered, smiling. "I am taking very good care of it. I am extremely struck," she added, turning away, "with the off-hand way in which you speak of a woman leaving her husband. It's easy to see you have never had one!"

"Well," said Henrietta, as if she were beginning an argument, "nothing is more common in our western cities, and it is to them, after all, that we must look in the future." Her argument, however, does not concern this history, which has too many other threads to unwind. She announced to Ralph Touchett that she was ready to leave

Rome by any train that he might designate, and Ralph immediately pulled himself together for departure. Isabel went to see him at the last, and he made the same remark that Henrietta had made. It struck him that Isabel was uncommonly glad to get rid of them all.

For all answer to this she gently laid her hand on his, and said in a low tone, with a quick smile—

"My dear Ralph!"

It was answer enough, and he was quite contented. But he went on, in the same way, jocosely, ingenuously—"I've seen less of you than I might, but it's better than nothing. And then I have heard a great deal about you."

"I don't know from whom, leading the life you have done."

"From the voices of the air! Oh, from no one else; I never let other people speak of you. They always say you are 'charming,' and that's so flat."

"I might have seen more of you, certainly," Isabel said. "But when one is married one has so much occupation."

"Fortunately I am not married. When you come to see me in England, I shall be able to entertain you with all the freedom of a bachelor." He continued to talk as if they should certainly meet again, and succeeded in making the assumption appear almost just. He made no allusion to his term being near, to the probability that he should not outlast the summer. If he preferred it so, Isabel was willing enough; the reality was sufficiently distinct, without their erecting finger-posts in conversation. That had been well enough for the earlier time, though about this as about his other affairs Ralph had never been egotistic. Isabel spoke of his journey, of the stages into which he should divide it, of the precautions he should take.

"Henrietta is my greatest precaution," Ralph said. "The conscience of that woman is sublime."

"Certainly, she will be very conscientious."

"Will be? She has been! It's only because she thinks it's her duty that she goes with me. There's a conception of duty for you."

"Yes, it's a generous one," said Isabel, "and it makes me deeply ashamed. I ought to go with you, you know."

"Your husband wouldn't like that."

"No, he wouldn't like it. But I might go, all the same."

"I am startled by the boldness of your imagination. Fancy my being a cause of disagreement between a lady and her husband!"

"That's why I don't go," said Isabel, simply, but not very lucidly.

Ralph understood well enough, however. "I should think so, with all those occupations you speak of."

"It isn't that. I am afraid," said Isabel. After a pause she repeated, as if to make herself, rather than him, hear the words—"I am afraid."

Ralph could hardly tell what her tone meant; it was so strangely deliberate—apparently so void of emotion. Did she wish to do public penance for a fault of which she had not been convicted? or were her words simply an attempt at enlightened self-analysis? However this might be, Ralph could not resist so easy an opportunity. "Afraid of your husband?" he said, jocosely.

"Afraid of myself!" said Isabel, getting up. She stood there a moment, and then she added—"If I were afraid of my husband, that would be simply my duty. That is what women are expected to be."

"Ah, yes," said Ralph, laughing; "but to make up for it there is always some man awfully afraid of some woman!"

She gave no heed to this pleasantry, but suddenly took a different turn. "With Henrietta at the head of your little band," she exclaimed abruptly, "there will be nothing left for Mr. Goodwood!"

"Ah, my dear Isabel," Ralph answered, "he's used to that. There *is* nothing left for Mr. Goodwood!"

Isabel coloured, and then she declared, quickly, that she must leave him. They stood together a moment; both her hands were in both of his. "You have been my best friend," she said.

"It was for you that I wanted—that I wanted to live. But I am of no use to you."

Then it came over her more poignantly that she should not see him again. She could not accept that; she could

not part with him that way. "If you should send for me I would come," she said at last.

"Your husband won't consent to that."

"Oh yes, I can arrange it."

"I shall keep that for my last pleasure!" said Ralph.

In answer to which she simply kissed him.

It was a Thursday, and that evening Caspar Goodwood came to the Palazzo Roccanera. He was among the first to arrive, and he spent some time in conversation with Gilbert Osmond, who almost always was present when his wife received. They sat down together, and Osmond, talkative, communicative, expansive, seemed possessed with a kind of intellectual gaiety. He leaned back with his legs crossed, lounging and chatting, while Goodwood, more restless, but not at all lively, shifted his position, played with his hat, made the little sofa creak beneath him. Osmond's face wore a sharp, aggressive smile; he was like a man whose perceptions had been quickened by good news. He remarked to Goodwood that he was very sorry they were to lose him; he himself should particularly miss him. He saw so few intelligent men—they were surprisingly scarce in Rome. He must be sure to come back; there was something very refreshing, to an inveterate Italian like himself, in talking with a genuine outsider.

"I am very fond of Rome, you know," Osmond said; "but there is nothing I like better than to meet people who haven't that superstition. The modern world is after all very fine. Now you are thoroughly modern, and yet you are not at all flimsy. So many of the moderns we see are such very poor stuff. If they are the children of the future we are willing to die young. Of course the ancients too are often very tiresome. My wife and I like everything that is really new—not the mere pretence of it. There is nothing new, unfortunately, in ignorance and stupidity. We see plenty of that in forms that offer themselves as a revelation of progress, of light. A revelation of vulgarity! There is a certain kind of vulgarity which I believe is really new; I don't think there ever was anything like it before. Indeed I don't find vulgarity, at all, before the present century. You see a faint menace of it here and there in the last,

but to-day the air has grown so dense that delicate things are literally not recognised. Now, we have liked you——" And Osmond hesitated a moment, laying his hand gently on Goodwood's knee and smiling with a mixture of assurance and embarrassment. "I am going to say something extremely offensive and patronising, but you must let me have the satisfaction of it. We have liked you because—because you have reconciled us a little to the future. If there are to be a certain number of people like you—*à la bonne heure!* I am talking for my wife as well as for myself, you see. She speaks for me; why shouldn't I speak for her? We are as united, you know, as the candlestick and the snuffers. Am I assuming too much when I say that I think I have understood from you that your occupations have been—a—commercial? There is a danger in that, you know; but it's the way you have escaped that strikes us. Excuse me if my little compliment seems in execrable taste; fortunately my wife doesn't hear me. What I mean is that you *might have been*—a—what I was mentioning just now. The whole American world was in a conspiracy to make you so. But you resisted, you have something that saved you. And yet you are so modern, so modern; the most modern man we know! We shall always be delighted to see you again."

I have said that Osmond was in good-humour, and these remarks will give ample evidence of the fact. They were infinitely more personal than he usually cared to be, and if Caspar Goodwood had attended to them more closely he might have thought that the defence of delicacy was in rather odd hands. We may believe, however, that Osmond knew very well what he was about, and that if he chose for once to be a little vulgar, he had an excellent reason for the escapade. Goodwood had only a vague sense that he was laying it on, somehow; he scarcely knew where the mixture was applied. Indeed he scarcely knew what Osmond was talking about; he wanted to be alone with Isabel, and that idea spoke louder to him than her husband's perfectly modulated voice. He watched her talking with other people, and wondered when she would be at liberty, and whether he might ask her to go into one of the other rooms.

His humour was not, like Osmond's of the best; there was an element of dull rage in his consciousness of things. Up to this time he had not disliked Osmond personally; he had only thought him very well-informed and obliging, and more than he had supposed like the person whom Isabel Archer would naturally marry. Osmond had won in the open field a great advantage over him, and Goodwood had too strong a sense of fair play to have been moved to underrate him on that account. He had not tried positively to like him; this was a flight of sentimental benevolence of which, even in the days when he came nearest to reconciling himself to what had happened, Goodwood was quite incapable. He accepted him as a rather brilliant personage of the amateurish kind, afflicted with a redundancy of leisure which it amused him to work off in little refinements of conversation. But he only half trusted him; he could never make out why the deuce Osmond should lavish refinements of any sort upon *him*. It made him suspect that he found some private entertainment in it, and it ministered to a general impression that his successful rival had a fantastic streak in his composition. He knew indeed that Osmond could have no reason to wish him evil; he had nothing to fear from him. He had carried off a supreme advantage, and he could afford to be kind to a man who had lost everything. It was true that Goodwood at times had wished Osmond were dead, and would have liked to kill him; but Osmond had no means of knowing this, for practice had made Goodwood quite perfect in the art of appearing inaccessible to-day to any violent emotion. He cultivated this art in order to deceive himself, but it was others that he deceived first. He cultivated it, moreover, with very limited success; of which there could be no better proof than the deep, dumb irritation that reigned in his soul when he heard Osmond speak of his wife's feelings as if he were commissioned to answer for them. That was all he had an ear for in what his host said to him this evening; he was conscious that Osmond made more of a point even than usual of referring to the conjugal harmony which prevailed at the Palazzo Roccanera. He was more careful than ever to speak as if he and his wife had all things in sweet com-

munity, and it were as natural to each of them to say "we" as to say "I." In all this there was an air of intention which puzzled and angered our poor Bostonian, who could only reflect for his comfort that Mrs. Osmond's relations with her husband were none of his business. He had no proof whatever that her husband misrepresented her, and if he judged her by the surface of things was bound to believe that she liked her life. She had never given him the faintest sign of discontent. Miss Stackpole had told him that she had lost her illusions, but writing for the papers had made Miss Stackpole sensational. She was too fond of early news. Moreover, since her arrival in Rome she had been much on her guard; she had ceased to flash her lantern at him. This, indeed, it may be said for her, would have been quite against her conscience. She had now seen the reality of Isabel's situation, and it had inspired her with a just reserve. Whatever could be done to improve it, the most useful form of assistance would not be to inflame her former lovers with a sense of her wrongs. Miss Stackpole continued to take a deep interest in the state of Mr. Goodwood's feelings, but she showed it at present only by sending him choice extracts, humorous and other, from the American journals, of which she received several by every post and which she always perused with a pair of scissors in her hand. The articles she cut out she placed in an envelope addressed to Mr. Goodwood, which she left with her own hand at his hotel. He never asked her a question about Isabel; hadn't he come five thousand miles to see for himself? He was thus not in the least authorised to think Mrs. Osmond unhappy; but the very absence of authorisation operated as an irritant, ministered to the angry pain with which, in spite of his theory that he had ceased to care, he now recognised that, as far as she was concerned, the future had nothing more for him. He had not even the satisfaction of knowing the truth; apparently he could not even be trusted to respect her if she *were* unhappy. He was hopeless, he was helpless, he was superfluous. To this last fact she had called his attention by her ingenious plan for making him leave Rome. He had no objection whatever to doing what he could for her

cousin, but it made him grind his teeth to think that of all the services she might have asked of him this was the one she had been eager to select. There had been no danger of her choosing one that would have kept him in Rome!

To-night what he was chiefly thinking of was that he was to leave her to-morrow, and that he had gained nothing by coming but the knowledge that he was as superfluous as ever. About herself he had gained no knowledge; she was imperturbable, impenetrable. He felt the old bitterness, which he had tried so hard to swallow, rise again in his throat, and he knew that there are disappointments which last as long as life. Osmond went on talking; Goodwood was vaguely aware that he was touching again upon his perfect intimacy with his wife. It seemed to him for a moment that Osmond had a kind of demoniac imagination; it was impossible that without malice he should have selected so unusual a topic. But what did it matter, after all, whether he were demoniac or not, and whether she loved him or hated him? She might hate him to the death without Goodwood's gaining by it.

"You travel, by the by, with Touchett," Osmond said. "I suppose that means that you will move slowly?"

"I don't know; I shall do just as he likes."

"You are very accommodating. We are immensely obliged to you; you must really let me say it. My wife has probably expressed to you what we feel. Touchett has been on our minds all winter; it has looked more than once as if he would never leave Rome. He ought never to have come; it's worse than an imprudence for people in that state to travel; it's a kind of indelicacy. I wouldn't for the world be under such an obligation to Touchett as he has been to—to my wife and me. Other people inevitably have to look after him, and every one isn't so generous as you."

"I have nothing else to do," said Caspar, dryly.

Osmond looked at him a moment, askance. "You ought to marry, and then you would have plenty to do! It is true that in that case you wouldn't be quite so available for deeds of mercy."

"Do you find that as a married man you are so much occupied?"

"Ah, you see, being married is in itself an occupation. It isn't always active; it's often passive; but that takes even more attention. Then my wife and I do so many things together. We read, we study, we make music, we walk, we drive—we talk even, as when we first knew each other. I delight, to this hour, in my wife's conversation. If you are ever bored, get married. Your wife indeed may bore you, in that case; but you will never bore yourself. You will always have something to say to yourself—always have a subject of reflection."

"I am not bored," said Goodwood. "I have plenty to think about and to say to myself."

"More than to say to others!" Osmond exclaimed, with a light laugh. "Where shall you go next? I mean after you have consigned Touchett to his natural care-takers—I believe his mother is at last coming back to look after him. That little lady is superb; she neglects her duties with a finish! Perhaps you will spend the summer in England?"

"I don't know; I have no plans."

"Happy man! That's a little nude, but it's very free."

"Oh yes, I am very free."

"Free to come back to Rome, I hope," said Osmond, as he saw a group of new visitors enter the room. "Remember that when you do come we count upon you!"

Goodwood had meant to go away early, but the evening elapsed without his having a chance to speak to Isabel otherwise than as one of several associated interlocutors. There was something perverse in the inveteracy with which she avoided him; Goodwood's unquenchable rancour discovered an intention where there was certainly no appearance of one. There was absolutely no appearance of one. She met his eye with her sweet hospitable smile, which seemed almost to ask that he would come and help her to entertain some of her visitors. To such suggestions, however, he only opposed a stiff impatience. He wandered about and waited; he talked to the few people he knew, who found him for the first time rather self-contradictory. This was indeed rare with Caspar Goodwood, though he often contradicted others. There was often music at the Palazzo Roccanera, and it was usually very good. Under cover of the

music he managed to contain himself; but toward the end, when he saw the people beginning to go, he drew near to Isabel and asked her in a low tone if he might not speak to her in one of the other rooms, which he had just assured himself was empty.

She smiled as if she wished to oblige him, but found herself absolutely prevented. "I'm afraid it's impossible. People are saying good-night, and I must be where they can see me."

"I shall wait till they are all gone, then!"

She hesitated a moment. "Ah, that will be delightful!" she exclaimed.

And he waited, though it took a long time yet. There were several people, at the end, who seemed tethered to the carpet. The Countess Gemini, who was never herself till midnight, as she said, displayed no consciousness that the entertainment was over; she had still a little circle of gentlemen in front of the fire, who every now and then broke into a united laugh. Osmond had disappeared—he never bade good-bye to people; and as the Countess was extending her range, according to her custom at this period of the evening, Isabel had sent Pansy to bed. Isabel sat a little apart; she too appeared to wish that her sister-in-law would sound a lower note and let the last loiterers depart in peace.

"May I not say a word to you now?" Goodwood presently asked her.

She got up immediately, smiling. "Certainly, we will go somewhere else, if you like."

They went together, leaving the Countess with her little circle, and for a moment after they had crossed the threshold neither of them spoke. Isabel would not sit down; she stood in the middle of the room slowly fanning herself, with the same familiar grace. She seemed to be waiting for him to speak. Now that he was alone with her, all the passion that he had never stifled surged into his senses; it hummed in his eyes and made things swim around him. The bright, empty room grew dim and blurred, and through the rustling tissue he saw Isabel hover before him with gleaming eyes and parted lips. If he had seen more distinctly he would have perceived that her smile was fixed

and a trifle forced—that she was frightened at what she saw in his own face.

"I suppose you wish to bid me good-bye?" she said.

"Yes—but I don't like it. I don't want to leave Rome," he answered, with almost plaintive honesty.

"I can well imagine. It is wonderfully good of you. I can't tell you how kind I think you."

For a moment more he said nothing. "With a few words like that you make me go."

"You must come back some day," Isabel rejoined, brightly.

"Some day? You mean as long a time hence as possible."

"Oh no; I don't mean all that."

"What *do* you mean? I don't understand! But I said I would go, and I will go," Goodwood added.

"Come back whenever you like," said Isabel, with attempted lightness.

"I don't care a straw for your cousin!" Caspar broke out.

"Is that what you wished to tell me?"

"No, no; I didn't want to tell you anything; I wanted to ask you—" he paused a moment, and then—"what have you really made of your life?" he said, in a low, quick tone. He paused again, as if for an answer; but she said nothing, and he went on—"I can't understand, I can't penetrate you! What am I to believe—what do you want me to think?" Still she said nothing; she only stood looking at him, now quite without pretending to smile. "I am told you are unhappy, and if you are I should like to know it. That would be something for me. But you yourself say you are happy, and you are somehow so still, so smooth. You are completely changed. You conceal everything; I haven't really come near you."

"You come very near," Isabel said, gently, but in a tone of warning.

"And yet I don't touch you! I want to know the truth. Have you done well?"

"You ask a great deal."

"Yes—I have always asked a great deal. Of course you won't tell me. I shall never know, if you can help it. And then it's none of my business." He had spoken with a visible effort to control himself, to give a considerate form to an

inconsiderate state of mind. But the sense that it was his last chance, that he loved her and had lost her, that she would think him a fool whatever he should say, suddenly gave him a lash and added a deep vibration to his low voice. "You are perfectly inscrutable, and that's what makes me think you have something to hide. I say that I don't care a straw for your cousin, but I don't mean that I don't like him. I mean that it isn't because I like him that I go away with him. I would go if he were an idiot, and you should have asked me. If you should ask me, I would go to Siberia to-morrow. Why do you want me to leave the place? You must have some reason for that; if you were as contented as you pretend you are, you wouldn't care. I would rather know the truth about you, even if it's damnable, than have come here for nothing. That isn't what I came for. I thought I shouldn't care. I came because I wanted to assure myself that I needn't think of you any more. I haven't thought of anything else, and you are quite right to wish me to go away. But if I must go, there is no harm in my letting myself out for a single moment, is there? If you are really hurt—if *he* hurts you—nothing *I* say will hurt you. When I tell you I love you, it's simply what I came for. I thought it was for something else; but it was for that. I shouldn't say it if I didn't believe I should never see you again. It's the last time—let me pluck a single flower! I have no right to say that, I know; and you have no right to listen. But you don't listen; you never listen, you are always thinking of something else. After this I must go, of course; so I shall at least have a reason. Your asking me is no reason, not a real one. I can't judge by your husband," he went on, irrelevantly, almost incoherently, "I don't understand him; he tells me you adore each other. Why does he tell me that? What business is it of mine? When I say that to you, you look strange. But you always look strange. Yes, you have something to hide. It's none of my business—very true. But I love you," said Caspar Goodwood.

As he said, she looked strange. She turned her eyes to the door by which they had entered, and raised her fan as if in warning.

"You have behaved so well; don't spoil it," she said, softly.

"No one hears me. It's wonderful what you tried to put me off with. I love you as I have never loved you."

"I know it. I knew as soon as you consented to go."

"You can't help it—of course not. You would if you could, but you can't, unfortunately. Unfortunately for me, I mean. I ask nothing—nothing, that is, that I shouldn't. But I do ask one sole satisfaction—that you tell me—that you tell me——"

"That I tell you what?"

"Whether I may pity you."

"Should you like that?" Isabel asked, trying to smile again.

"To pity you? Most assuredly! That at least would be doing something. I would give my life to it."

She raised her fan to her face, which it covered, all except her eyes. They rested a moment on his.

"Don't give your life to it; but give a thought to it every now and then."

And with that Isabel went back to the Countess Gemini.

CHAPTER XLIX

MADAME MERLE had not made her appearance at the Palazzo Roccanera on the evening of that Thursday of which I have narrated some of the incidents, and Isabel, though she observed her absence, was not surprised by it. Things had passed between them which added no stimulus to sociability, and to appreciate which we must glance a little backward.

It has been mentioned that Madame Merle returned from Naples shortly after Lord Warburton had left Rome, and that on her first meeting with Isabel (whom, to do her justice, she came immediately to see) her first utterance was an inquiry as to the whereabouts of this nobleman, for whom she appeared to hold her dear friend accountable.

"Please don't talk of him," said Isabel, for answer; "we have heard so much of him of late."

Madame Merle bent her head on one side a little, protestingly, and smiled in the left corner of her mouth.

"You have heard, yes. But you must remember that I have not, in Naples. I hoped to find him here, and to be able to congratulate Pansy."

"You may congratulate Pansy still; but not on marrying Lord Warburton."

"How you say that! Don't you know I had set my heart on it?" Madame Merle asked, with a great deal of spirit, but still with the intonation of good-humour.

Isabel was discomposed, but she was determined to be good-humoured too.

"You shouldn't have gone to Naples, then. You should have stayed here to watch the affair."

"I had too much confidence in you. But do you think it is too late?"

"You had better ask Pansy," said Isabel.

"I shall ask her what you have said to her."

These words seemed to justify the impulse of self-defence aroused on Isabel's part by her perceiving that her visitor's attitude was a critical one. Madame Merle, as we know, had been very discreet hitherto; she had never criticised; she had been excessively afraid of intermeddling. But apparently she had only reserved herself for this occasion; for she had a dangerous quickness in her eye, and an air of irritation which even her admirable smile was not able to transmute. She had suffered a disappointment which excited Isabel's surprise—our heroine having no knowledge of her zealous interest in Pansy's marriage; and she betrayed it in a manner which quickened Mrs. Osmond's alarm. More clearly than ever before, Isabel heard a cold, mocking voice proceed from she knew not where, in the dim void that surrounded her, and declare that this bright, strong, definite, worldly woman, this incarnation of the practical, the personal, the immediate, was a powerful agent in her destiny. She was nearer to her than Isabel had yet discovered, and her nearness was not the charming accident that she had so long thought. The sense of accident indeed had died within her that day when she happened to be struck with the manner in which Madame Merle and her own husband sat together in private. No definite suspicion had as yet taken its place; but it was enough to make her look at this lady with a different eye, to have been led to reflect that there was more intention in her past behaviour than she had allowed for at the time. Ah, yes, there had been intention, there had been intention, Isabel said to herself; and she seemed to wake from a long, pernicious dream. What was it that brought it home to her that Madame Merle's intention had not been good? Nothing but the mistrust which had lately taken body, and which married itself now to the fruitful wonder produced by her visitor's challenge on behalf of poor Pansy. There was something in this challenge which at the very outset excited an answering defiance; a nameless vitality which Isabel now saw to have been absent from her friend's professions of delicacy and caution. Madame Merle has been unwilling to interfere, certainly, but only so long as there was nothing to interfere with. It will perhaps seem to the reader that Isabel went fast in casting doubt, on mere suspicion, on a sincerity proved

by several years of good offices. She moved quickly, indeed, and with reason, for a strange truth was filtering into her soul. Madame Merle's interest was identical with Osmond's; that was enough.

"I think Pansy will tell you nothing that will make you more angry," she said, in answer to her companion's last remark.

"I am not in the least angry. I have only a great desire to retrieve the situation. Do you think his lordship has left us for ever?"

"I can't tell you; I don't understand you. It's all over; please let it rest. Osmond has talked to me a great deal about it, and I have nothing more to say or to hear. I have no doubt," Isabel added, "that he will be very happy to discuss the subject with you."

"I know what he thinks; he came to see me last evening."

"As soon as you had arrived? Then you know all about it and you needn't apply to me for information."

"It isn't information I want. At bottom, it's sympathy. I had set my heart on that marriage; the idea did what so few things do—it satisfied the imagination."

"Your imagination, yes. But not that of the persons concerned."

"You mean by that of course that I am not concerned. Of course not directly. But when one is such an old friend, one can't help having something at stake. You forget how long I have known Pansy. You mean, of course," Madame Merle added, "that *you* are one of the persons concerned."

"No; that's the last thing I mean. I am very weary of it all."

Madame Merle hesitated a little. "Ah yes, your work's done."

"Take care what you say," said Isabel, very gravely.

"Oh, I take care; never perhaps more than when it appears least. Your husband judges you severely."

Isabel made for a moment no answer to this; she felt choked with bitterness. It was not the insolence of Madame Merle's informing her that Osmond had been taking her into his confidence as against his wife that struck her most; for she was not quick to believe that this was meant for insolence. Madame Merle was very rarely insolent, and only when it was

exactly right. It was not right now, or at least it was not right yet. What touched Isabel like a drop of corrosive acid upon an open wound, was the knowledge that Osmond dishonoured her in his words as well as in his thoughts.

"Should you like to know how I judge him?" she asked at last.

"No, because you would never tell me. And it would be painful for me to know."

There was a pause, and for the first time since she had known her, Isabel thought Madame Merle disagreeable. She wished she would leave her.

"Remember how attractive Pansy is, and don't despair," she said abruptly, with a desire that this should close their interview.

But Madame Merle's expansive presence underwent no contradiction. She only gathered her mantle about her, and, with the movement, scattered upon the air a faint, agreeable fragrance.

"I don't despair," she answered; "I feel encouraged. And I didn't come to scold you; I came if possible to learn the truth. I know you will tell it if I ask you. It's an immense blessing with you, that one can count upon that. No, you won't believe what a comfort I take in it."

"What truth do you speak of." Isabel asked, wondering.

"Just this: whether Lord Warburton changed his mind quite of his own movement, or because you recommended it. To please himself, I mean; or to please you. Think of the confidence I must still have in you, in spite of having lost a little of it," Madame Merle continued with a smile, "to ask such a question as that!" She sat looking at Isabel a moment, to judge of the effect of her words, and she went on—"Now don't be heroic, don't be unreasonable, don't take offence. It seems to me I do you an honour in speaking so. I don't know another woman to whom I would do it. I haven't the least idea that any other woman would tell me the truth. And don't you see how well it is that your husband should know it? It is true that he doesn't appear to have had any tact whatever in trying to extract it; he has indulged in gratuitous suppositions. But that doesn't alter the fact that it would make a difference in his view of his daughter's prospects to

know distinctly what really occurred. If Lord Warburton simply got tired of the poor child, that's one thing; it's a pity. If he gave her up to please you, it's another. That's a pity, too; but in a different way. Then, in the latter case, you would perhaps resign yourself to not being pleased—to simply seeing your stepdaughter married. Let him off—let us have him!"

Madame Merle had proceeded very deliberately, watching her companion and apparently thinking she could proceed safely. As she went on, Isabel grew pale; she clasped her hands more tightly in her lap. It was not that Madame Merle had at last thought it the right time to be insolent; for this was not what was most apparent. It was a worse horror than that. "Who are you—what are you?" Isabel murmured. "What have you to do with my husband?" It was strange that, for the moment, she drew as near to him as if she had loved him.

"Ah, then you take it heroically! I am very sorry. Don't think, however, that I shall do so."

"What have you to do with me?" Isabel went on.

Madame Merle slowly got up, stroking her muff, but not removing her eyes from Isabel's face.

"Everything!" she answered.

Isabel sat there looking up at her, without rising; her face was almost a prayer to be enlightened. But the light of her visitor's eyes seemed only a darkness.

"Oh, misery!" she murmured at last; and she fell back, covering her face with her hands. It had come over her like a high-surging wave that Mrs. Touchett was right. Madame Merle had married her! Before she uncovered her face again, this lady had left the room.

Isabel took a drive, alone, that afternoon; she wished to be far away, under the sky, where she could descend from her carriage and tread upon the daisies. She had long before this taken old Rome into her confidence, for in a world of ruins the ruin of her happiness seemed a less unnatural catastrophe. She rested her weariness upon things that had crumbled for centuries and yet still were upright; she dropped her secret sadness into the silence of lonely places, where its very modern quality detached itself and grew ob-

jective, so that as she sat in a sun-warmed angle on a winter's day, or stood in a mouldy church to which no one came, she could almost smile at it and think of its smallness. Small it was, in the large Roman record, and her haunting sense of the continuity of the human lot easily carried her from the less to the greater. She had become deeply, tenderly acquainted with Rome; it interfused and moderated her passion. But she had grown to think of it chiefly as the place where people had suffered. This was what came to her in the starved churches, where the marble columns, transferred from pagan ruins, seemed to offer her a companionship in endurance, and the musty incense to be a compound of long-unanswered prayers. There was no gentler nor less consistent heretic than Isabel; the firmest of worshippers, gazing at dark altar-pictures or clustered candles, could not have felt more intimately the suggestiveness of these objects nor have been more liable at such moments to a spiritual visitation. Pansy, as we know, was almost always her companion, and of late the Countess Gemini, balancing a pink parasol, had lent brilliancy to their equipage; but she still occasionally found herself alone when it suited her mood, and where it suited the place. On such occasions she had several resorts; the most accessible of which perhaps was a seat on the low parapet which edges the wide grassy space lying before the high, cold front of St. John Lateran; where you look across the Campagna at the far-trailing outline of the Alban Mount, and at that mighty plain between, which is still so full of all that has vanished from it. After the departure of her cousin and his companions she wandered about more than usual; she carried her sombre spirit from one familiar shrine to the other. Even when Pansy and the Countess were with her, she felt the touch of a vanished world. The carriage passing out of the walls of Rome, rolled through narrow lanes, where the wild honeysuckle had begun to tangle itself in the hedges, or waited for her in quiet places where the fields lay near, while she strolled further and further over the flower-freckled turf, or sat on a stone that had once had a use, and gazed through the veil of her personal sadness at the splendid sadness of the scene—at the dense, warm light, the far gradations and soft confusions of colour, the motionless shepherds

in lonely attitudes, the hills where the cold-shadows had the lightness of a blush.

On the afternoon I began with speaking of, she had taken a resolution not to think of Madame Merle; but the resolution proved vain, and this lady's image hovered constantly before her. She asked herself, with an almost childlike horror of the supposition, whether to this intimate friend of several years the great historical epithet of *wicked* were to be applied. She knew the idea only by the Bible and other literary works; to the best of her belief she had no personal acquaintance with wickedness. She had desired a large acquaintance with human life, and in spite of her having flattered herself that she cultivated it with some success, this elementary privilege had been denied her. Perhaps it was not wicked—in the historic sense—to be false; for that was what Madame Merle had been. Isabel's Aunt Lydia had made this discovery long before, and had mentioned it to her niece; but Isabel had flattered herself at this time that she had a much richer view of things, especially of the spontaneity of her own career and the nobleness of her own interpretations, than poor stiffly-reasoning Mrs. Touchett. Madame Merle had done what she wanted; she had brought about the union of her two friends; a reflection which could not fail to make it a matter of wonder that she should have desired such an event. There were people who had the match-making passion, like the votaries of art for art; but Madame Merle, great artist as she was, was scarcely one of these. She thought too ill of marriage, too ill even of life; she had desired that marriage, but she had not desired others. She therefore had had an idea of gain, and Isabel asked herself where she had found her profit. It took her, naturally, a long time to discover, and even then her discovery was very incomplete. It came back to her that Madame Merle, though she had seemed to like her from their first meeting at Gardencourt, had been doubly affectionate after Mr. Touchett's death, and after learning that her young friend was a victim of the good old man's benevolence. She had found her profit not in the gross device of borrowing money from Isabel, but in the more refined idea of introducing one of her intimates to the young girl's fortune. She had naturally chosen her

closest intimate, and it was already vivid enough to Isabel that Gilbert Osmond occupied this position. She found herself confronted in this manner with the conviction that the man in the world whom she had supposed to be the least sordid, had married her for her money. Strange to say, it had never before occurred to her; if she had thought a good deal of harm of Osmond, she had not done him this particular injury. This was the worst she could think of, and she had been saying to herself that the worst was still to come. A man might marry a woman for her money, very well; the thing was often done. But at least he should let her know!

She wondered whether, if he wanted her money, her money to-day would satisfy him. Would he take her money and let her go? Ah, if Mr. Touchett's great charity would help her to-day, it would be blessed indeed! It was not slow to occur to her that if Madame Merle had wished to do Osmond a service, his recognition of the fact must have lost its warmth. What must be his feelings to-day in regard to his too zealous benefactress, and what expression must they have found on the part of such a master of irony? It is a singular, but a characteristic, fact that before Isabel returned from her silent drive she had broken its silence by the soft exclamation—

"Poor Madame Merle!"

Her exclamation would perhaps have been justified if on this same afternoon she had been concealed behind one of the valuable curtains of time-softened damask which dressed the interesting little *salon* of the lady to whom it referred; the carefully-arranged apartment to which we once paid a visit in company with the discreet Mr. Rosier. In that apartment, towards six o'clock, Gilbert Osmond was seated, and his hostess stood before him as Isabel had seen her stand on an occasion commemorated in this history with an emphasis appropriate not so much to its apparent as to its real importance.

"I don't believe you are unhappy; I believe you like it," said Madame Merle.

"Did I say I was unhappy?" Osmond asked, with a face grave enough to suggest that he might have been so.

"No, but you don't say the contrary, as you ought in common gratitude."

"Don't talk about gratitude," Osmond returned, dryly. "And don't aggravate me," he added in a moment.

Madame Merle slowly seated herself, with her arms folded and her white hands arranged as a support to one of them and an ornament, as it were, to the other. She looked exquisitely calm, but impressively sad.

"On your side, don't try to frighten me," she said. "I wonder whether you know some of my thoughts."

"No more than I can help. I have quite enough of my own."

"That's because they are so delightful."

Osmond rested his head against the back of his chair and looked at his companion for a long time, with a kind of cynical directness which seemed also partly an expression of fatigue. "You do aggravate me," he remarked in a moment. "I am very tired."

"Eh moi, donc!" cried Madame Merle.

"With you, it's because you fatigue yourself. With me, it's not my own fault."

"When I fatigue myself it's for you. I have given you an interest; that's a great gift."

"Do you call it an interest?" Osmond inquired, languidly.

"Certainly, since it helps you to pass your time."

"The time has never seemed longer to me than this winter."

"You have never looked better; you have never been so agreeable, so brilliant."

"Damn my brilliancy!" Osmond murmured, thoughtfully. "How little, after all, you know me!"

"If I don't know you, I know nothing," said Madame Merle smiling. "You have the feeling of complete success."

"No, I shall not have that till I have made you stop judging me."

"I did that long ago. I speak from old knowledge. But you express yourself more, too."

Osmond hesitated a moment. "I wish you would express yourself less!"

"You wish to condemn me to silence? Remember that I have never been a chatterbox. At any rate, there are three

or four things that I should like to say to you first—Your wife doesn't know what to do with herself," she went on, with a change of tone.

"Excuse me; she knows perfectly. She has a line sharply marked out. She means to carry out her ideas."

"Her ideas, to-day, must be remarkable."

"Certainly they are. She has more of them than ever."

"She was unable to show me any this morning," said Madame Merle. "She seemed in a very simple, almost in a stupid, state of mind. She was completely bewildered."

"You had better say at once that she was pathetic."

"Ah, no, I don't want to encourage you to much."

Osmond still had his head against the cushion behind him; the ankle of one foot rested on the other knee. So he sat for a while. "I should like to know what is the matter with you," he said, at last.

"The matter—the matter—" And here Madame Merle stopped. Then she went on, with a sudden outbreak of passion, a burst of summer thunder in a clear sky—"The matter is that I would give my right hand to be able to weep, and that I can't!"

"What good would it do you to weep?"

"It would make me feel as I felt before I knew you."

"If I have dried your tears, that's something. But I have seen you shed them."

"Oh, I believe you will make me cry still. I have a great hope of that. I was vile this morning; I was horrid," said Madame Merle.

"If Isabel was in the stupid state of mind you mention, she probably didn't perceive it," Osmond answered.

"It was precisely my devilry that stupefied her. I couldn't help it; I was full of something bad. Perhaps it was something good; I don't know. You have not only dried up my tears; you have dried up my soul."

"It is not I then than am responsible for my wife's condition," Osmond said. "It is pleasant to think that I shall get the benefit of your influence upon her. Don't you know the soul is an immortal principle? How can it suffer alteration?"

"I don't believe at all that it's an immortal principle. I believe it can perfectly be destroyed. That's what has happened to mine, which was a very good one to start with; and it's you I have to thank for it.—You are very bad," Madame Merle added, gravely.

"Is this the way we are to end?" Osmond asked, with the same studied coldness.

"I don't know how we are to end. I wish I did! How do bad people end? You have made me bad."

"I don't understand you. You seem to me quite good enough," said Osmond, his conscious indifference giving an extreme effect to the words.

Madame Merle's self-possession tended on the contrary to diminish, and she was nearer losing it than on any occasion on which we have had the pleasure of meeting her. Her eye brightened, even flashed; her smile betrayed a painful effort. "Good enough for anything that I have done with myself? I suppose that's what you mean."

"Good enough to be always charming!" Osmond exclaimed, smiling too.

"Oh God!" his companion murmured; and, sitting there in her ripe freshness, she had recourse to the same gesture that she had provoked on Isabel's part in the morning; she bent her face and covered it with her hands.

"Are you going to weep, after all?" Osmond asked; and on her remaining motionless he went on—"Have I ever complained to you?"

She dropped her hands quickly. "No, you have taken your revenge otherwise—you have taken it on *her*."

Osmond threw back his head further; he looked a while at the ceiling, and might have been supposed to be appealing, in an informal way, to the heavenly powers. "Oh, the imagination of women! It's always vulgar, at bottom. You talk of revenge like a third-rate novelist."

"Of course you haven't complained. You have enjoyed your triumph too much."

"I am rather curious to know what you call my triumph."

"You have made your wife afraid of you."

Osmond changed his position; he leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and looking a while at a beautiful

old Persian rug, at his feet. He had an air of refusing to accept any one's valuation of anything, even of time, and of preferring to abide by his own; a peculiarity which made him at moments an irritating person to converse with. "Isabel is not afraid of me, and it's not what I wish," he said at last. "To what do you wish to provoke me when you say such things as that?"

"I have thought over all the harm you can do me," Madame Merle answered. "Your wife was afraid of me this morning, but in me it was really you she feared."

"You may have said things that were in very bad taste; I am not responsible for that. I didn't see the use of your going to see her at all; you are capable of acting without her. I have not made you afraid of me, that I can see," Osmond went on; "how then should I have made her? You are at least as brave. I can't think where you have picked up such rubbish; one might suppose you knew me by this time." He got up, as he spoke, and walked to the chimney, where he stood a moment bending his eye, as if he had seen them for the first time, on the delicate specimens of rare porcelain with which it was covered. He took up a small cup and held it in his hand; then, still holding it and leaning his arm on the mantel, he continued: "You always see too much in everything; you overdo it; you lose sight of the real. I am much simpler than you think."

"I think you are very simple." And Madame Merle kept her eye upon her cup. "I have come to that with time. I judged you, as I say, of old; but it is only since your marriage that I have understood you. I have seen better what you have been to your wife than I ever saw what you were for me. Please be very careful of that precious object."

"It already has a small crack," said Osmond, dryly, as he put it down. "If you didn't understand me before I married, it was cruelly rash of you to put me into such a box. However, I took a fancy to my box myself; I thought it would be a comfortable fit. I asked very little; I only asked that she should like me."

"That she should like you so much!"

"So much, of course; in such a case one asks the maximum. That she should adore me, if you will. Oh yes, I wanted that."

"I never adored you," said Madame Merle.

"Ah, but you pretended to!"

"It is true that you never accused me of being a comfortable fit," Madame Merle went on.

"My wife has declined—declined to do anything of the sort," said Osmond. "If you are determined to make a tragedy of that, the tragedy is hardly for her."

"The tragedy is for me!" Madame Merle exclaimed, rising, with a long low sigh, but giving a glance at the same time at the contents of her mantel-shelf. "It appears that I am to be severely taught the disadvantages of a false position."

"You express yourself like a sentence in a copy-book. We must look for our comfort where we can find it. If my wife doesn't like me, at least my child does. I shall look for compensations in Pansy. Fortunately I haven't a fault to find with her."

"Ah," said Madame Merle, softly, "if I had a child—"

Osmond hesitated a moment; and then, with a little formal air—"The children of others may be a great interest!" he announced.

"You are more like a copy-book than I. There is something after all, that holds us together."

"Is it the idea of the harm I may do you?" Osmond asked.

"No; it's the idea of the good I may do for you. It is that," said Madame Merle, "that made me so jealous of Isabel. I want it to be *my* work," she added, with her face, which had grown hard and bitter, relaxing into its usual social expression.

Osmond took up his hat and his umbrella, and after giving the former article two or three strokes with his coat-cuff—"On the whole, I think," he said, "you had better leave it to me."

After he had left her, Madame Merle went and lifted from the mantel-shelf the attenuated coffee-cup in which he had mentioned the existence of a crack; but she looked at it rather abstractedly. "Have I been so vile all for nothing?" she murmured to herself.

CHAPTER L

AS the Countess Gemini was not acquainted with the ancient monuments, Isabel occasionally offered to introduce her to these interesting relics and to give their afternoon drive an antiquarian aim. The Countess, who professed to think her sister-in-law a prodigy of learning, never made an objection, and gazed at masses of Roman brickwork as patiently as if they had been mounds of modern drapery. She was not an antiquarian; but she was so delighted to be in Rome that she only desired to float with the current. She would gladly have passed an hour every day in the damp darkness of the Baths of Titus, if it had been a condition of her remaining at the Palazzo Roccanera. Isabel, however, was not a severe cicerone; she used to visit the ruins chiefly because they offered an excuse for talking about other matters than the love-affairs of the ladies of Florence, as to which her companion was never weary of offering information. It must be added that during these visits the Countess was not very active; her preference was to sit in the carriage and exclaim that everything was most interesting. It was in this manner that she had hitherto examined the Coliseum, to the infinite regret of her niece, who—with all the respect that she owed her—could not see why she should not descend from the vehicle and enter the building. Pansy had so little chance to ramble that her view of the case was not wholly disinterested; it may be divined that she had a secret hope that, once inside, her aunt might be induced to climb to the upper tiers. There came a day when the Countess announced her willingness to undertake this feat—a mild afternoon in March, when the windy month expressed itself in occasional puffs of spring. The three ladies went into the Coliseum together, but Isabel left her companions to wander over the place. She had often ascended to those desolate ledges from which the Roman crowd used to bellow applause, and where now the wild flowers (when they are

allowed), bloom in the deep crevices; and to-day she felt weary, and preferred to sit in the despoiled arena. It made an intermission, too, for the Countess often asked more from one's attention than she gave in return; and Isabel believed that when she was alone with her niece she let the dust gather for a moment upon the ancient scandals of Florence. She remained below, therefore, while Pansy guided her undiscriminating aunt to the steep brick staircase at the foot of which the custodian unlocks the tall wooden gate. The great inclosure was half in shadow; the western sun brought out the pale red tone of the great blocks of travertine—the latent colour which is the only living element in the immense ruin. Here and there wandered a peasant or a tourist, looking up at the far sky-line where in the clear stillness a multitude of swallows kept circling and plunging. Isabel presently became aware that one of the other visitors, planted in the middle of the arena, had turned his attention to her own person, and was looking at her with a certain little poise of the head, which she had some weeks before perceived to be characteristic of baffled but indestructible purpose. Such an attitude, to-day, could belong only to Mr. Edward Rosier; and this gentleman proved in fact to have been considering the question of speaking to her. When he had assured himself that she was unaccompanied he drew near, remarking that though she would not answer his letters she would perhaps not wholly close her ears to his spoken eloquence. She replied that her step-daughter was close at hand and she could only give him five minutes; whereupon he took out his watch and sat down upon a broken block.

"It's very soon told," said Edward Rosier. "I have sold all my bibelots!"

Isabel gave, instinctively, an exclamation of horror; it was as if he had told her he had had all his teeth drawn.

"I have sold them by auction at the Hôtel Drouot," he went on. "The sale took place three days ago, and they have telegraphed me the result. It's magnificent."

"I am glad to hear it; but I wish you had kept your pretty things."

"I have the money instead—forty thousand dollars. Will Mr. Osmond think me rich enough now?"

"Is it for that you did it?" Isabel asked, gently.

"For what else in the world could it be? That is the only thing I think of. I went to Paris and made my arrangements. I couldn't stop for the sale; I couldn't have seen them going off; I think it would have killed me. But I put them into good hands, and they brought high prices. I should tell you I have kept my enamels. Now I have got the money in my pocket, and he can't say I'm poor!" the young man exclaimed, defiantly.

"He will say now that you are not wise," said Isabel, as if Gilbert Osmond had never said this before.

Rosier gave her a sharp look.

"Do you mean that without my bibelots I am nothing? Do you mean that they were the best thing about me? That's what they told me in Paris; oh, they were very frank about it. But they hadn't seen *her!*"

"My dear friend, you deserve to succeed," said Isabel, very kindly.

"You say that so sadly that it's the same as if you said I shouldn't." And he questioned her eye with the clear trepidation of his own. He had the air of a man who knows he has been the talk of Paris for a week and is full half a head taller in consequence; but who also has a painful suspicion that in spite of this increase in stature one or two persons still have the perversity to think him diminutive. "I know what happened here while I was away," he went on. "What does Mr. Osmond expect, after she has refused Lord Warburton?"

Isabel hesitated a moment.

"That she will marry another nobleman."

"What other nobleman?"

"One that he will pick out."

Rosier slowly got up, putting his watch into his waistcoat-pocket.

"You are laughing at some one; but this time I don't think it's at me."

"I didn't mean to laugh," said Isabel. "I laugh very seldom. Now you had better go away."

"I feel very safe!" Rosier declared, without moving. This might be; but it evidently made him feel more so to make the announcement in rather a loud voice, balancing himself a

little complacently, on his toes, and looking all around the Coliseum, as if it were filled with an audience. Suddenly Isabel saw him change colour; there was more of an audience than he had suspected. She turned, and perceived that her two companions had returned from their excursion.

"You must really go away," she said, quickly.

"Ah, my dear lady, pity me!" Edward Rosier murmured, in voice strangely at variance with the announcement I have just quoted. And then he added, eagerly, like a man who in the midst of his misery is seized by a happy thought—"Is that lady the Countess Gemini? I have a great desire to be presented to her."

Isabel looked at him a moment.

"She has no influence with her brother."

"Ah, what a monster you make him out!" Rosier exclaimed, glancing at the Countess, who advanced, in front of Pansy, with an animation partly due perhaps to the fact that she perceived her sister-in-law to be engaged in conversation with a very pretty young man.

"I am glad you have kept your enamels!" Isabel exclaimed, leaving him. She went straight to Pansy, who, on seeing Edward Rosier, had stopped short, with lowered eyes. "We will go back to the carriage," said Isabel gently.

"Yes, it is getting late," Pansy answered, more gently still. And she went on without a murmur, without faltering or glancing back.

Isabel, however, allowed herself this last liberty, and saw that a meeting had immediately taken place between the Countess and Mr. Rosier. He had removed his hat, and was bowing and smiling; he had evidently introduced himself; while the Countess's expressive back displayed to Isabel's eye a gracious inclination. These facts, however, were presently lost to sight, for Isabel and Pansy took their places again in the carriage. Pansy, who faced her stepmother, at first kept her eyes fixed on her lap; then she raised them and rested them on Isabel's. There shone out of each of them a little melancholy ray—a spark of timid passion which touched Isabel to the heart. At the same time a wave of envy passed over her soul, as she compared the tremulous longing, the definite ideal, of the young girl with her own dry despair.

"Poor little Pansy!" she said, affectionately.

"Oh, never mind!" Pansy answered, in the tone of eager apology.

And then there was a silence; the Countess was a long time coming.

"Did you show your aunt everything, and did she enjoy it?" Isabel asked at last.

"Yes, I showed her everything. I think she was very much pleased."

"And you are not tired, I hope."

"Oh no, thank you, I am not tired."

The Countess still remained behind, so that Isabel requested the footman to go into the Coliseum and tell her that they were waiting. He presently returned with the announcement that the Signora Contessa begged them not to wait—she would come home in a cab!

About a week after this lady's quick sympathies had enlisted themselves with Mr. Rosier, Isabel, going rather late to dress for dinner, found Pansy sitting in her room. The girl seemed to have been waiting for her; she got up from her low chair.

"Excuse my taking the liberty," she said, in a small voice. "It will be the last—for some time."

Her voice was strange, and her eyes, widely opened, had an excited, frightened look.

"You are not going away!" Isabel exclaimed.

"I am going to the convent."

"To the convent?"

Pansy drew nearer, till she was near enough to put her arms round Isabel and rest her head on her shoulder. She stood this way a moment, perfectly still; but Isabel could feel her trembling. The tremor of her little body expressed everything that she was unable to say.

Nevertheless, Isabel went on in a moment—

"Why are you going to the convent?"

"Because papa thinks it best. He says a young girl is better, every now and then, for making a little retreat. He says the world, always the world, is very bad for a young girl. This is just a chance for a little seclusion—a little reflection." Pansy spoke in short detached sentences, as if

she could not trust herself. And then she added, with a triumph of self-control—"I think papa is right; I have been so much in the world this winter."

Her announcement had a strange effect upon Isabel; it seemed to carry a larger meaning than the girl herself knew.

"When was this decided?" she asked. "I have heard nothing of it."

"Papa told me half-an-hour ago; he thought it better it shouldn't be too much talked about in advance. Madame Catherine is to come for me at a quarter past seven, and I am only to take two dresses. It is only for a few weeks; I am sure it will be very good. I shall find all those ladies who used to be so kind to me, and I shall see the little girls who are being educated. I am very fond of little girls," said Pansy, with a sort of diminutive grandeur. "And I am also very fond of Mother Catherine. I shall be very quiet, and think a great deal."

Isabel listened to her, holding her breath; she was almost awe-struck.

"Think of *me,* sometimes," she said.

"Ah, come and see me soon!" cried Pansy; and the cry was very different from the heroic remarks of which she had just delivered herself.

Isabel could say nothing more; she understood nothing; she only felt that she did not know her husband yet. Her answer to Pansy was a long tender kiss.

Half-an-hour later she learned from her maid that Madame Catherine had arrived in a cab, and had departed again with the Signorina. On going to the drawing-room before dinner she found the Countess Gemini alone, and this lady characterised the incident by exclaiming, with a wonderful toss of the head—*"En voilà, ma chère, une pose!"* But if it was an affectation, she was at a loss to see what her husband affected. She could only dimly perceive that he had more traditions than she supposed. It had become her habit to be so careful as to what she said to him that, strange as it may appear, she hesitated, for several minutes after he had come in, to allude to his daughter's sudden departure; she spoke of it only after they were seated at table.

But she had forbidden herself ever to ask Osmond a question. All she could do was to make a declaration, and there was one that came very naturally.

"I shall miss Pansy very much."

Osmond looked a while, with his head inclined a little, at the basket of flowers in the middle of the table.

"Ah, yes," he said at last, "I had thought of that. You must go and see her, you know; but not too often. I dare say you wonder why I sent her to the good sisters; but I doubt whether I can make you understand. It doesn't matter; don't trouble yourself about it. That's why I had not spoken of it. I didn't believe you would enter into it. But I have always had the idea; I have always thought it a part of the education of a young girl. A young girl should be fresh and fair; she should be innocent and gentle. With the manners of the present time she is liable to become so dusty and crumpled! Pansy is a little dusty, a little dishevelled; she has knocked about too much. This bustling, pushing rabble, that calls itself society—one should take her out of it occasionally. Convents are very quiet, very convenient, very salutary. I like to think of her there, in the old garden, under the arcade, among those tranquil, virtuous women. Many of them are gentlewomen born; several of them are noble. She will have her books and her drawing; she will have her piano. I have made the most liberal arrangements. There is to be nothing ascetic; there is just to be a certain little feeling. She will have time to think, and there is something I want her to think about." Osmond spoke deliberately, reasonably, still with his head on one side, as if he were looking at the basket of flowers. His tone, however, was that of a man not so much offering an explanation as putting a thing into words—almost into pictures—to see, himself, how it would look. He contemplated a while the picture he had evoked, and seemed greatly pleased with it. And then he went on—"The Catholics are very wise, after all. The convent is a great institution; we can't do without it; it corresponds to an essential need in families, in society. It's a school of good manners; it's a school of repose. Oh, I don't want to detach my daughter from the world," he added; "I don't want to make

her fix her thoughts on the other one. This one is very well, after all, and she may think of it as much as she chooses. Only she must think of it in the right way."

Isabel gave an extreme attention to this little sketch; she found it indeed intensely interesting. It seemed to show her how far her husband's desire to be effective was capable of going—to the point of playing picturesque tricks upon the delicate organism of his daughter. She could not understand his purpose, no—not wholly; but she understood it better than he supposed or desired, inasmuch as she was convinced that the whole proceeding was an elaborate mystification, addressed to herself and destined to act upon her imagination. He wished to do something sudden and arbitrary, something unexpected and refined; to mark the difference between his sympathies and her own, and to show that if he regarded his daughter as a precious work of art, it was natural he should be more and more careful about the finishing touches. If he wished to be effective he had succeeded; the incident struck a chill into Isabel's heart. Pansy had known the convent in her childhood and had found a happy home there; she was fond of the good sisters, who were very fond of her, and there was therefore, for the moment, no definite hardship in her lot. But all the same, the girl had taken fright; the impression her father wanted to make would evidently be sharp enough. The old Protestant tradition had never faded from Isabel's imagination, and as her thoughts attached themselves to this striking example of her husband's genius—she sat looking, like him, at the basket of flowers—poor little Pansy became the heroine of a tragedy. Osmond wished it to be known that he shrank from nothing, and Isabel found it hard to pretend to eat her dinner. There was a certain relief, presently, in hearing the high, bright voice of her sister-in-law. The Countess, too, apparently, had been thinking the thing out; but she had arrived at a different conclusion from Isabel.

"It is very absurd, my dear Osmond," she said, "to invent so many pretty reasons for poor Pansy's banishment. Why don't you say at once that you want to get her out of my way? Haven't you discovered that I think very well of

Mr. Rosier? I do indeed; he seems to me a delightful young man. He has made me believe in true love; I never did before! Of course you have made up your mind that with those convictions I am dreadful company for Pansy."

Osmond took a sip of a glass of wine; he looked perfectly good-humoured.

"My dear Amy," he answered, smiling as if he were uttering a piece of gallantry, "I don't know anything about your convictions, but if I suspected that they interfere with mine it would be much simpler to banish you."

CHAPTER LI

THE Countess was not banished, but she felt the insecurity of her tenure of her brother's hospitality. A week after this incident Isabel received a telegram from England, dated from Gardencourt, and bearing the stamp of Mrs. Touchett's authorship. "Ralph cannot last many days," it ran, "and if convenient would like to see you. Wishes me to say that you must come only if you have not other duties. Say, for myself, that you used to talk a good deal about your duty and to wonder what it was; shall be curious to see whether you have found it out. Ralph is dying, and there is no other company." Isabel was prepared for this news, having received from Henrietta Stackpole a detailed account of her journey to England with her appreciative patient.

Ralph had arrived more dead than alive, but she had managed to convey him to Gardencourt, where he had taken to his bed, which, as Miss Stackpole wrote, he evidently would never leave again. "I like him much better sick than when he used to be well," said Henrietta, who, it will be remembered, had taken a few years before a sceptical view of Ralph's disabilities. She added that she had really had two patients on her hands instead of one, for that Mr. Goodwood, who had been of no earthly use, was quite as sick, in a different way, as Mr. Touchett. Afterwards she wrote that she had been obliged to surrender the field to Mrs. Touchett, who had just returned from America, and had promptly given her to understand that she didn't wish any interviewing at Gardencourt. Isabel had written to her aunt shortly after Ralph came to Rome, letting her know of his critical condition, and suggesting that she should lose no time in returning to Europe. Mrs. Touchett had telegraphed an acknowledgment of this admonition, and the only further news Isabel received from her was the second telegram which I have just quoted.

Isabel stood a moment looking at the latter missive, then, thrusting it into her pocket, she went straight to the door of her husband's study. Here she again paused an instant, after which she opened the door and went in. Osmond was seated at the table near the window with a folio volume before him, propped against a pile of books. This volume was open at a page of small coloured plates, and Isabel presently saw that he had been copying from it the drawing of an antique coin. A box of water-colours and fine brushes lay before him, and he had already transferred to a sheet of immaculate paper the delicate, finely-tinted disk. His back was turned toward the door, but without looking round he recognised his wife.

"Excuse me for disturbing you," she said.

"When I come to your room I always knock," he answered, going on with his work.

"I forgot; I had something else to think of. My cousin is dying."

"Ah, I don't believe that," said Osmond, looking at his drawing through a magnifying glass. "He was dying when we married; he will outlive us all."

Isabel gave herself no time, no thought, to appreciate the careful cynicism of this declaration; she simply went on quickly, full of her own intention—

"My aunt has telegraphed for me; I must go to Gardencourt."

"Why must you go to Gardencourt?" Osmond asked, in the tone of impartial curiosity.

"To see Ralph before he dies."

To this, for some time, Osmond made no rejoinder; he continued to give his chief attention to his work, which was of a sort that would brook no negligence.

"I don't see the need of it," he said at last. "He came to see you here. I didn't like that; I thought his being in Rome a great mistake. But I tolerated it, because it was to be the last time you should see him. Now you tell me it is not to have been the last. Ah, you are not grateful!"

"What am I to be grateful for?"

Gilbert Osmond laid down his little implements, blew a speck of dust from his drawing, slowly got up, and for the first time looked at his wife.

"For my not having interfered while he was here."

"Oh yes, I am. I remember perfectly how distinctly you let me know you didn't like it. I was very glad when he went away."

"Leave him alone then. Don't run after him."

Isabel turned her eyes away from him; they rested upon his little drawing.

"I must go to England," she said, with a full consciousness that her tone might strike an irritable man of taste as stupidly obstinate.

"I shall not like it if you do," Osmond remarked.

"Why should I mind that? You won't like it if I don't. You like nothing I do or don't do. You pretend to think I lie."

Osmond turned slightly pale; he gave a cold smile.

"That's why you must go then? Not to see your cousin, but to take a revenge on me."

"I know nothing about revenge."

"I do," said Osmond. "Don't give me an occasion."

"You are only too eager to take one. You wish immensely that I would commit some folly."

"I shall be gratified then if you disobey me."

"If I disobey you?" said Isabel, in a low tone, which had the effect of gentleness.

"Let it be clear. If you leave Rome to-day it will be a piece of the most deliberate, the most calculated, opposition."

"How can you call it calculated? I received my aunt's telegram but three minutes ago."

"You calculate rapidly; it's a great accomplishment. I don't see why we should prolong our discussion; you know my wish." And he stood there as if he expected to see her withdraw.

But she never moved; she couldn't move, strange as it may seem; she still wished to justify herself; he had the power, in an extraordinary degree, of making her feel this need. There was something in her imagination that he could always appeal to against her judgment.

"You have no reason for such a wish," said Isabel, "and I have every reason for going. I can't tell you how unjust

you seem to me. But I think you know. It is your own opposition that is calculated. It is malignant."

She had never uttered her worst thought to her husband before, and the sensation of hearing it was evidently new to Osmond. But he showed no surprise, and his coolness was apparently a proof that he had believed his wife would in fact be unable to resist for ever his ingenious endeavour to draw her out.

"It is all the more intense, then," he answered. And he added, almost as if he were giving her a friendly counsel—"This is a very important matter." She recognised this; she was fully conscious of the weight of the occasion; she knew that between them they had arrived at a crisis. Its gravity made her careful; she said nothing, and he went on. "You say I have no reason? I have the very best. I dislike, from the bottom of my soul, what you intend to do. It's dishonourable; it's indelicate; it's indecent. Your cousin is nothing whatever to me, and I am under no obligation to make concessions to him. I have already made the very handsomest. Your relations with him, while he was here, kept me on pins and needles; but I let that pass, because from week to week I expected him to go. I have never liked him and he has never liked me. That's why you like him—because he hates me," said Osmond, with a quick, barely audible tremor in his voice. "I have an ideal of what my wife should do and should not do. She should not travel across Europe alone, in defiance of my deepest desire, to sit at the bedside of other men. Your cousin is nothing to you; he is nothing to us. You smile most expressively when I talk about *us;* but I assure you that *we, we,* is all that I know. I take our marriage seriously; you appear to have found a way of not doing so. I am not aware that we are divorced or separated; for me we are indissolubly united. you are nearer to me than any human creature, and I am nearer to you. It may be a disagreeable proximity; it's one, at any rate, of our own deliberate making. You don't like to be reminded of that, I know; but I am perfectly willing, because—because—" And Osmond paused a moment, looking as if he had something to say which would be very much to the point. "Because I think we should accept the conse-

quences of our actions, and what I value most in life is the honour of a thing!"

He spoke gravely and almost gently; the accent of sarcasm had dropped out of his tone. It had a gravity which checked his wife's quick emotion; the resolution with which she had entered the room found itself caught in a mesh of fine threads. His last words were not a command, they constituted a kind of appeal; and though she felt that any expression of respect on Osmond's part could only be a refinement of egotism, they represented something transcendent and absolute, like the sign of the cross or the flag of one's country. He spoke in the name of something sacred and precious—the observance of a magnificent form. They were as perfectly apart in feeling as two disillusioned lovers had ever been; but they had never yet separated in act. Isabel had not changed; her old passion for justice still abode within her; and now, in the very thick of her sense of her husband's blasphemous sophistry, it began to throb to a tune which for a moment promised him the victory. It came over her that in his wish to preserve appearances he was after all sincere, and that this, as far as it went, was a merit. Ten minutes before, she had felt all the joy of irreflective action—a joy to which she had so long been a stranger; but action had been suddenly changed to slow renunciation, transformed by the blight of her husband's touch. If she must renounce, however, she would let him know that she was a victim rather than a dupe. "I know you are a master of the art of mockery," she said. "How can you speak of an indissoluble union—how can you speak of your being contented? Where is our union when you accuse me of falsity? Where is your contentment when you have nothing but hideous suspicion in your heart?"

"It is in our living decently together, in spite of such drawbacks."

"We don't live decently together!" Isabel cried.

"Indeed we don't, if you go to England."

"That's very little; that's nothing. I might do much more."

Osmond raised his eyebrows and even his shoulders a little; he had lived long enough in Italy to catch this trick.

"Ah, if you have come to threaten me, I prefer my drawing," he said, walking back to his table, where he took up the sheet of paper on which he had been working and stood a moment examining his work.

"I suppose that if I go you will not expect me to come back," said Isabel.

He turned quickly round, and she could see that this movement at least was not studied. He looked at her a little, and then—"Are you out of your mind?" he inquired.

"How can it be anything but a rupture?" she went on; "especially if all you say is true?" She was unable to see how it could be anything but a rupture; she sincerely wished to know what else it might be.

Osmond sat down before his table. "I really can't argue with you on the hypothesis of your defying me," he said. And he took up one of his little brushes again.

Isabel lingered but a moment longer; long enough to embrace with her eye his whole deliberately indifferent, yet most expressive, figure; after which she quickly left the room. Her faculties, her energy, her passion, were all dispersed again; she felt as if a cold, dark mist had suddenly encompassed her. Osmond possessed in a supreme degree the art of eliciting one's weakness.

On her way back to her room she found the Countess Gemini standing in the open doorway of a little parlour in which a small collection of heterogeneous books had been arranged. The Countess had an open volume in her hand; she appeared to have been glancing down a page which failed to strike her as interesting. At the sound of Isabel's step she raised her head.

"Ah my dear," she said, "you, who are so literary, do tell me some amusing book to read! Everything here is so fearfully edifying. Do you think this would do me any good?"

Isabel glanced at the title of the volume she held out, but without reading or understanding it. "I am afraid I can't advise you. I have had bad news. My cousin, Ralph Touchett, is dying."

The Countess threw down her book. "Ah, he was so nice! I am sorry for you," she said.

"You would be sorrier still if you knew."

"What is there to know? You look very badly," the Countess added. "You must have been with Osmond."

Half-an-hour before, Isabel would have listened very coldly to an intimation that she should ever feel a desire for the sympathy of her sister-in-law, and there can be no better proof of her present embarrassment than the fact that she almost clutched at this lady's fluttering attention. "I have been with Osmond," she said, while the Countess's bright eyes glittered at her.

"I am sure he has been odious!" the Countess cried. "Did he say he was glad poor Mr. Touchett is dying?"

"He said it is impossible I should go to England."

The Countess's mind, when her interests were concerned, was agile; she already foresaw the extinction of any further brightness in her visit to Rome. Ralph Touchett would die, Isabel would go into mourning, and then there would be no more dinner-parties. Such a prospect produced for a moment in her countenance an expressive grimace; but this rapid, picturesque play of feature was her only tribute to disappointment. After all, she reflected, the game was almost played out; she had already overstayed her invitation. And and she cared enough for Isabel's trouble to forget her own, and she saw that Isabel's trouble was deep. It seemed deeper than the mere death of a cousin, and the Countess had no hesitation in connecting her exasperating brother with the expression of her sister-in-law's eyes. Her heart beat with an almost joyous expectation; for if she had wished to see Osmond overtopped, the conditions looked favourable now. Of course, if Isabel should go to England, she herself would immediately leave the Palazzo Roccanera; nothing would induce her to remain there with Osmond. Nevertheless she felt an immense desire to hear that Isabel would go to England. "Nothing is impossible for you, my dear," she said, caressingly. "Why else are you rich and clever and good?"

"Why indeed? I feel stupidly weak."

"Why does Osmond say it's impossible?" the Countess asked, in a tone which sufficiently declared that she couldn't imagine.

From the moment that she began to question her however, Isabel drew back; she disengaged her hand, which the Countess had affectionately taken. But she answered this inquiry with frank bitterness. "Because we are so happy together that we cannot separate even for a fortnight."

"Ah," cried the Countess, while Isabel turned away; "when I want to make a journey my husband simply tells me I can have no money!"

Isabel went to her room, where she walked up and down for an hour. It may seem to some readers that she took things very hard, and it is certain that for a woman of a high spirit she had allowed herself easily to be arrested. It seemed to her that only now she fully measured the great undertaking of matrimony. Marriage meant that in such a case as this, when one had to choose, one chose as a matter of course for one's husband. "I am afraid—yes, I am afraid," she said to herself more than once, stopping short in her walk. But what she was afraid of was not her husband—his displeasure, his hatred, his revenge; it was not even her own later judgment of her conduct—a consideration which had often held her in check; it was simply the violence there would be in going when Osmond wished her to remain. A gulf of difference had opened between them, but nevertheless it was his desire that she should stay, it was a horror to him that she should go. She knew the nervous fineness with which he could feel an objection. What he thought of her she knew; what he was capable of saying to her she had felt; yet they were married, for all that, and marriage meant that a woman should abide with her husband. She sank down on her sofa at last, and buried her head in a pile of cushions.

When she raised her head again, the Countess Gemini stood before her. She had come in noiselessly, unperceived; she had a strange smile on her thin lips, and a still stranger glitter in her small dark eyes.

"I knocked," she said, "but you didn't answer me. So I ventured in. I have been looking at you for the last five minutes. You are very unhappy."

"Yes; but I don't think you can comfort me."

"Will you give me leave to try?" And the Countess sat down on the sofa beside her. She continued to smile, and there was something communicative and exultant in her expression. She appeared to have something to say, and it occurred to Isabel for the first time that her sister-in-law might say something important. She fixed her brilliant eyes upon Isabel, who found at last a disagreeable fascination in her gaze. "After all," the Countess went on, "I must tell you, to begin with, that I don't understand your state of mind. You seem to have so many scruples, so many reasons, so many ties. When I discovered, ten years ago, that my husband's dearest wish was to make me miserable—of late he has simply let me alone—ah, it was a wonderful simplification! My poor Isabel, you are not simple enough."

"No, I am not simple enough," said Isabel.

"There is something I want you to know," the Countess declared—"because I think you ought to know it. Perhaps you do; perhaps you have guessed it. But if you have, all I can say is that I understand still less why you shouldn't do as you like."

"What do you wish me to know?" Isabel felt a foreboding which made her heart beat. The Countess was about to justify herself, and this alone was portentous.

But the Countess seemed disposed to play a little with her subject. "In your place I should have guessed it ages ago. Have you never really suspected?"

"I have guessed nothing. What should I have suspected? I don't know what you mean."

"That's because you have got such a pure mind. I never saw a woman with such a pure mind!" cried the Countess.

Isabel slowly got up. "You are going to tell me something horrible."

"You can call it by whatever name you will!" And the Countess rose also, while the sharp animation of her bright, capricious face emitted a kind of flash. She stood a moment looking at Isabel, and then she said—"My first sister-in-law had no children!"

Isabel stared back at her; the announcement was an anti-climax. "Your first sister-in-law?" she murmured.

I suppose you know that Osmond has been married before? I have never spoken to you of his wife; I didn't suppose it was proper. But others, less particular, must have done so. The poor little woman lived but two years and died childless. It was after her death that Pansy made her appearance."

Isabel's brow had gathered itself into a frown; her lips were parted in pale, vague wonder. She was trying to follow; there seemed to be more to follow than she could see. "Pansy is not my husband's child, then?"

"Your husband's—in perfection! But no one else's husband's. Some one else's wife's. Ah, my good Isabel," cried the Countess, "with you one must dot one's *i*'s!"

"I don't understand; whose wife's?" said Isabel.

"The wife of a horrid little Swiss, who died twelve years ago. He never recognised Miss Pansy, and there was no reason he should. Osmond did, and that was better."

Isabel stayed the name which rose in a sudden question to her lips; she sank down on her seat again, hanging her head. "Why have you told me this?" she asked, in a voice which the Countess hardly recognised.

"Because I was so tired of your not knowing! I was tired of not having told you. It seemed to me so dull. It's not a lie, you know; it's exactly as I say."

"I never knew," said Isabel, looking up at her, simply.

"So I believed—though it was hard to believe. Has it never occurred to you that he has been her lover?"

"I don't know. Something has occurred to me. Perhaps it was that."

"She has been wonderfully clever about Pansy!" cried the Countess.

"That thing has never occurred to me," said Isabel. "And as it is—I don't understand."

She spoke in a low, thoughtful tone, and the poor Countess was equally surprised and disappointed at the effect of her revelation. She had expected to kindle a conflagration, and as yet she had barely extracted a spark. Isabel seemed more awe-stricken than anything else.

"Don't you perceive that the child could never pass for her husband's?" the Countess asked. "They have been separated

too long for that, and M. Merle had gone to some far country; I think to South America. If she had ever had children —which I am not sure of—she had lost them. On the other hand, circumstances made it convenient enough for Osmond to acknowledge the little girl. His wife was dead—very true; but she had only been dead a year, and what was more natural than that she should have left behind a pledge of their affection? With the aid of a change of residence—he had been living at Naples, and he left it for ever—the little fable was easily set going. My poor sister-in-law, who was in her grave, couldn't help herself, and the real mother, to save her reputation, renounced all visible property in the child."

"Ah, poor creature!" cried Isabel, bursting into tears. It was a long time since she had shed any; she had suffered a reaction from weeping. But now they gushed with an abundance in which the Countess Gemini found only another discomfiture.

"It's very kind of you to pity her!" she cried with a discordant laugh. "Yes, indeed, you have a pure mind!"

"He must have been false to his wife," said Isabel, suddenly controlling herself.

"That's all that's wanting—that you should take up *her* cause!" the Countess went on.

"But to me—to me—" And Isabel hesitated, though there was a question in her eyes.

"To you he has been faithful? It depends upon what you call faithful. When he married you, he was no longer the lover of another woman. That state of things had passed away; the lady had repented; and she had a worship of appearances so intense that even Osmond himself got tired of it. You may therefore imagine what it was! But the whole past was between them."

"Yes," said Isabel, "the whole past is between them."

"Ah, this later past is nothing. But for five years they were very intimate."

"Why then did she want him to marry me?"

"Ah, my dear, that's her superiority! Because you had money; and because she thought you would be good to Pansy."

"Poor woman—and Pansy who doesn't like her!" cried Isabel.

"That's the reason she wanted some one whom Pansy would like. She knows it; she knows everything."

"Will she know that you have told me this?"

"That will depend upon whether you tell her. She is prepared for it, and do you know what she counts upon for her defence? On your thinking that I lie. Perhaps you do; don't make yourself uncomfortable to hide it. Only, as it happens this time, I don't. I have told little fibs; but they have never hurt any one by myself."

Isabel sat staring at her companion's story as at a bale of fantastic wares that some strolling gipsy might have unpacked on the carpet at her feet. "Why did Osmond never marry her?" she asked, at last.

"Because she had no money." The Countess had an answer for everything, and if she lied she lied well. "No one knows, no one has ever known, what she lives on, or how she has got all those beautiful things. I don't believe Osmond himself knows. Besides, she wouldn't have married him."

"How can she have loved him then?"

"She doesn't love him, in that way. She did at first, and then, I suppose, she would have married him; but at that time her husband was living. By the time M. Merle had rejoined—I won't say his ancestors, because he never had any—her relations with Osmond had changed, and she had grown more ambitious. She hoped she might marry a great man; that has always been her idea. She has waited and watched and plotted and prayed; but she has never succeeded. I don't call Madame Merle a success, you know. I don't know what she may accomplish yet, but at present she has very little to show. The only tangible result she has ever achieved—except, of course, getting to know every one and staying with them free of expense—has been her bringing you and Osmond together. Oh, she did that, my dear; you needn't look as if you doubted it. I have watched them for years; I know everything—everything. I am thought a great scatterbrain, but I have had enough application of mind to follow up those two. She hates me, and her way of showing it is to

pretend to be for ever defending me. When people say I have had fifteen lovers, she looks horrified, and declares that quite half of them were never proved. She has been afraid of me for years, and she has taken great comfort in the vile, false things that people have said about me. She has been afraid I would expose her, and she threatened me one day, when Osmond began to pay his court to you. It was at his house in Florence; do you remember that afternoon when she brought you there and we had tea in the garden? She let me know then that if I should tell tales, two could play at that game. She pretends there is a good deal more to tell about me than about her. It would be an interesting comparison! I don't care a fig what she may say, simply because I know you don't care a fig. You can't trouble your head about me less than you do already. So she may take her revenge as she chooses; I don't think she will frighten you very much. Her great idea has been to be tremendously irreproachable—a kind of full-blown lily—the incarnation of propriety. She has always worshipped that god. There should be no scandal about Cæsar's wife, you know; and, as I say, she has always hoped to marry Cæsar. That was one reason she wouldn't marry Osmond; the fear that on seeing her with Pansy people would put things together—would even see a resemblance. She has had a terror lest the mother should betray herself. She has been awfully careful; the mother has never done so."

"Yes, yes, the mother has done so," said Isabel, who had listened to all this with a face of deepening dreariness. "She betrayed herself to me the other day, though I didn't recognise her. There appeared to have been a chance of Pansy's making a great marriage, and in her disappointment at its not coming off she almost dropped the mask."

"Ah, that's where she would stumble!" cried the Countess. "She has failed so dreadfully herself that she is determined her daughter shall make it up."

Isabel started at the words "her daughter," which the Countess threw off so familiarly. "It seems very wonderful," she murmured; and in this bewildering impression she had almost lost her sense of being personally touched by the story.

"Now don't go and turn against the poor innocent child!" the Countess went on. "She is very nice, in spite of her lamentable parentage. I have liked Pansy, not because she was hers—but because she had become yours."

"Yes, she has become mine. And how the poor woman must have suffered at seeing me——!" Isabel exclaimed, flushing quickly at the thought.

"I don't believe she has suffered; on the contrary, she has enjoyed. Osmond's marriage has given Pansy a great life. Before that she lived in a hole. And do you know what the mother thought? That you might take such a fancy to the child that you would do something for her. Osmond, of course could never give her a portion. Osmond was really extremely poor; but of course you know all about that.—Ah, my dear," cried the Countess, "why did you ever inherit money?" She stopped a moment, as if she saw something singular in Isabel's face. "Don't tell me now that you will give her a dowry. You are capable of that, but I shouldn't believe it. Don't try to be too good. Be a little wicked, feel a little wicked, for once in your life!"

"It's very strange. I suppose I ought to know, but I am sorry," Isabel said. "I am much obliged to you."

"Yes, you seem to be!" cried the Countess, with a mocking laugh. "Perhaps you are—perhaps you are not. You don't take it as I should have thought."

"How should I take it?" Isabel asked.

"Well, I should say as a woman who has been made use of." Isabel made no answer to this; she only listened, and the Countess went on. "They have always been bound to each other; they remained so even after she became proper. But he has always been more for her than she has been for him. When their little carnival was over they made a bargain that each should give the other complete liberty, but that each should also do everything possible to help the other on. You may ask me how I know such a thing as that. I know it by the way they have behaved. Now see how much better women are than men! She has found a wife for Osmond, but Osmond has never lifted a little finger for her. She has worked for him, plotted for him, suffered for him; she has even more than once found money for him; and the end of

it is that he is tired of her. She is an old habit; there are moments when he needs her; but on the whole he wouldn't miss her if she were removed. And, what's more, to-day she knows it. So you needn't be jealous!" the Countess added, humorously.

Isabel rose from her sofa again; she felt bruised and short of breath; her head was humming with new knowledge. "I am much obliged to you," she repeated. And then she added, abruptly, in quite a different tone—"How do you know all this?"

This inquiry appeared to ruffle the Countess more than Isabel's expression of gratitude pleased her. She gave her companion a bold stare, with which—"Let us assume that I have invented it!" she cried. She too, however, suddenly changed her tone, and, laying her hand on Isabel's arm, said softly, with her sharp, bright smile—"Now will you give up your journey?"

Isabel started a little; she turned away. But she felt weak and in a moment had to lay her arm upon the mantel-shelf for support. She stood a minute so, and then upon her arm she dropped her dizzy head, with closed eyes and pale lips.

"I have done wrong to speak—I have made you ill!" the Countess cried.

"Ah, I must see Ralph!" Isabel murmured; not in resentment, not in the quick passion her companion had looked for; but in a tone of exquisite far-reaching sadness.

CHAPTER LII

THERE was a train to Turin and Paris that evening; and after the Countess had left her, Isabel had a rapid and decisive conference with her maid, who was discreet, devoted, and active. After this, she thought (except of her journey) of only one thing. She must go and see Pansy; from her she could not turn away. She had not seen her yet, as Osmond had given her to understand that it was too soon to begin. She drove at five o'clock to a high door in a narrow street in the quarter of the Piazza Navona, and was admitted by the portress of the convent, a genial and obsequious person. Isabel had been at this institution before; she had come with Pansy to see the sisters. She knew they were good women, and she saw that the large rooms were clean and cheerful, and that the well-used garden had sun for winter and shade for spring. But she disliked the place, and it made her horribly sad; not for the world would she have spent a night there. It produced to-day more than before the impression of a well appointed prison; for it was not possible to pretend that Pansy was free to leave it. This innocent creature had been presented to her in a new and violent light, but the secondary effect of the revelation was to make Isabel reach out her hand to her.

The portress left her to wait in the parlour of the convent, while she went to make it known that there was a visitor for the dear young lady. The parlour was a vast, cold apartment, with new-looking furniture; a large clean stove of white porcelain, unlighted; a collection of wax-flowers, under glass; and a series of engravings from religious pictures on the walls. On the other occasion Isabel had thought it less like Rome than like Philadelphia; but to-day she made no reflections; the apartment only seemed to her very empty and very soundless. The portress returned at the end of some five minutes, ushering in another person. Isabel got up, ex-

pecting to see one of the ladies of the sisterhood; but to her extreme surprise she found herself confronted with Madame Merle. The effect was strange, for Madame Merle was already so present to her vision that her appearance in the flesh was a sort of reduplication. Isabel had been thinking all day of her falsity, her audacity, her ability, her probable suffering; and these dark things seemed to flash with a sudden light as she entered the room. Her being there at all was a kind of vivid proof. It made Isabel feel faint; if it had been necessary to speak on the spot, she would have been quite unable. But no such necessity was distinct to her; it seemed to her indeed that she had absolutely nothing to say to Madame Merle. In one's relations with this lady, however, there were never any absolute necessities; she had a manner which carried off not only her own deficiencies, but those of other people. But she was different from usual; she came in slowly, behind the portress, and Isabel instantly perceived that she was not likely to depend upon her habitual resources. For her, too, the occasion was exceptional, and she had undertaken to treat it by the light of the moment. This gave her a peculiar gravity; she did not even pretend to smile, and though Isabel saw that she was more than ever playing a part, it seemed to her that on the whole the wonderful woman had never been so natural. She looked at Isabel from head to foot, but not harshly nor defiantly; with a cold gentleness rather, and an absence of any air of allusion to their last meeting. It was as if she had wished to mark a difference; she had been irritated then—she was reconciled now.

"You can leave us alone," she said to the portress; "in five minutes this lady will ring for you." And then she turned to Isabel, who, after noting what has just been mentioned, had ceased to look at her, and had let her eyes wander as far as the limits of the room would allow. She wished never to look at Madame Merle again. "You are surprised to find me here, and I am afraid you are not pleased," this lady went on. "You don't see why I should have come; it's as if I had anticipated you. I confess I have been rather indiscreet—I ought to have asked your permission." There was none of the oblique movement of irony in this; it was said

simply and softly; but Isabel, far afloat on a sea of wonder and pain, could not have told herself with what intention it was uttered. "But I have not been sitting long," Madame Merle continued; "that is, I have not been long with Pansy. I came to see her because it occurred to me this afternoon that she must be rather lonely, and perhaps even a little miserable. It may be good for a young girl; I know so little about young girls, I can't tell. At any rate it's a little dismal. Therefore I came—on the chance. I knew of course that you would come, and her father as well; still, I had not been told that other visitors were forbidden. The good woman —what's her name? Madame Catherine—made no objection whatever. I stayed twenty minutes with Pansy; she has a charming little room, not in the least conventual, with a piano and flowers. She has arranged it delightfully; she has so much taste. Of course it's all none of my business, but I feel happier since I have seen her. She may even have a maid if she likes; but of course she has no occasion to dress. She wears a little black dress; she looks so charming. I went afterwards to see Mother Catherine, who has a very good room too; I assure you I don't find the poor sisters at all monastic. Mother Catherine has a most coquettish little toilet-table, with something that looked uncommonly like a bottle of eau-de-Cologne. She speaks delightfully of Pansy; says it's a great happiness for them to have her. She is a little saint of heaven, and a model to the oldest of them. Just as I was leaving Madame Catherine, the portress came to say to her that there was a lady for the Signorina. Of course I knew it must be you, and I asked her to let me go and receive you in her place. She demurred greatly—I must tell you that—and said it was her duty to notify the Superior; it was of such high importance that you should be treated with respect. I requested her to let the poor Superior alone, and asked her how she supposed I would treat you!"

So Madame Merle went on, with much of the brilliancy of a woman who had long been a mistress of the art of conversation. But there were phases and gradations in her speech, not one of which was lost upon Isabel's ear, though her eyes were absent from her companion's face. She had not proceeded far before Isabel noted a sudden rupture in

her voice, which was in itself a complete drama. This subtle modulation marked a momentous discovery—the perception of an entirely new attitude on the part of her listener. Madame Merle had guessed in the space of an instant that everything was at end between them, and in the space of another instant she had guessed the reason why. The person who stood there was not the same one she had seen hitherto; it was a very different person—a person who knew her secret. This discovery was tremendous, and for the moment she made it the most accomplished of women faltered and lost her courage. But only for that moment. Then the conscious stream of her perfect manner gathered itself again and flowed on as smoothly as might be to the end. But it was only because she had the end in view that she was able to go on. She had been touched with a point that made her quiver, and she needed all the alertness of her will to repress her agitation. Her only safety was in not betraying herself. She did not betray herself; but the startled quality of her voice refused to improve—she couldn't help it—while she heard herself say she hardly knew what. The tide of her confidence ebbed, and she was able only just to glide into port, faintly grazing the bottom.

Isabel saw all this as distinctly as if it had been a picture on the wall. It might have been a great moment for her, for it might have been a moment of triumph. That Madame Merle had lost her pluck and saw before her the phantom of exposure—this in itself was a revenge, this in itself was almost a symptom of a brighter day. And for a moment while she stood apparently looking out of the window with her back half turned, Isabel enjoyed her knowledge. On the other side of the window lay the garden of the convent; but this is not what Isabel saw; she saw nothing of the budding plants and the glowing afternoon. She saw, in the crude light of that revelation which had already become a part of experience and to which the very frailty of the vessel in which it had been offered her only gave an intrinsic price, the dry, staring fact that she had been a dull un-reverenced tool. All the bitterness of this knowledge surged into her soul again; it was as if she felt on her lips the taste of dishonour. There was a moment during which, if she had

turned and spoken, she would have said something that would hiss like a lash. But she closed her eyes, and then the hideous vision died away. What remained was the cleverest woman in the world, standing there within a few feet of her and knowing as little what to think as the meanest. Isabel's only revenge was to be silent still—to leave Madame Merle in this unprecedented situation. She left her there for a period which must have seemed long to this lady, who at last seated herself with a movement which was in itself a confession of helplessness. Then Isabel turned her eyes and looked down at her. Madame Merle was very pale; her own eyes covered Isabel's face. She might see what she would, but her danger was over. Isabel would never accuse her, never reproach her; perhaps because she never would give her the opportunity to defend herself.

"I am come to bid Pansy good-bye," Isabel said at last. "I am going to England to-night."

"Going to England to-night!" Madame Merle repeated, sitting there and looking up at her.

"I am going to Gardencourt. Ralph Touchett is dying."

"Ah, you will feel that." Madame Merle recovered herself; she had a chance to express sympathy. "Do you go alone?" she asked.

"Yes; without my husband."

Madame Merle gave a low, vague murmur; a sort of recognition of the general sadness of things.

"Mr. Touchett never liked me; but I am sorry he is dying. Shall you see his mother?"

"Yes; she has returned from America."

"She used to be very kind to me; but she has changed. Others, too, have changed," said Madame Merle, with a quiet, noble pathos. She paused a moment, and then she said, "And you will see dear old Gardencourt again!"

"I shall not enjoy it much," Isabel answered.

"Naturally—in your grief. But it is on the whole, of all the houses I know, and I know many, the one I should have liked best to live in. I don't venture to send a message to the people," Madame Merle added; "but I should like to give my love to the place."

Isabel turned away.

"I had better go to Pansy," she said. "I have not much time."

And while she looked about her for the proper egress, the door opened and admitted one of the ladies of the house, who advanced with a discreet smile, gently rubbing, under her long loose sleeves, a pair of plump white hands. Isabel recognised her as Madame Catherine, whose acquaintance she had already made, and begged that she would immediately let her see Miss Osmond. Madame Catherine looked doubly discreet, but smiled very blandly and said—

"It will be good for her to see you. I will take you to her myself." Then she directed her pleasant, cautious little eye towards Madame Merle.

"Will you let me remain a little?" this lady asked. "It is so good to be here."

"You may remain always, if you like!" And the good sister gave a knowing laugh.

She led Isabel out of the room, through several corridors, and up a long staircase. All these departments were solid and bare, light and clean; so, thought Isabel, are the great penal establishments. Madame Catherine gently pushed open the door of Pansy's room and ushered in the visitor; then stood smiling with folded hands, while the two others met and embraced.

"She is glad to see you," she repeated; "it will do her good." And she placed the best chair carefully for Isabel. But she made no movement to seat herself; she seemed ready to retire. "How does this dear child look?" she asked of Isabel, lingering a moment.

"She looks pale," Isabel answered.

"That is the pleasure of seeing you. She is very happy. *Elle éclaire la maison,*" said the good sister.

Pansy wore, as Madame Merle had said, a little black dress; it was perhaps this that made her look pale.

"They are very good to me—they think of everything!" she exclaimed, with all her customary eagerness to say something agreeable.

"We think of you always—you are a precious charge," Madame Catherine remarked, in the tone of a woman with whom benevolence was a habit, and whose conception of duty

was the acceptance of every care. It fell with a leaden weight upon Isabel's ears; it seemed to represent the surrender of a personality, the authority of the Church.

When Madame Catherine had left them together, Pansy kneeled down before Isabel and hid her head in her stepmother's lap. So she remained some moments, while Isabel gently stroked her hair. Then she got up, averting her face and looking about the room.

"Don't you think I have arranged it well? I have everything I have at home."

"It is very pretty; you are very comfortable." Isabel scarcely knew what she could say to her. On the one hand she could not let her think she had come to pity her, and on the other it would be dull mockery to pretend to rejoice with her. So she simply added, after a moment, "I have come to bid you good-bye. I am going to England."

Pansy's white little face turned red.

"To England! Not to come back?"

"I don't know when I shall come back."

"Ah; I'm sorry," said Pansy, faintly. She spoke as if she had no right to criticise; but her tone expressed a depth of disappointment.

"My cousin, Mr. Touchett, is very ill; he will probably die. I wish to see him," Isabel said.

"Ah, yes; you told me he would die. Of course you must go. And will papa go?"

"No; I shall go alone."

For a moment, Pansy said nothing. Isabel had often wondered what she thought of the apparent relations of her father with his wife; but never by a glance, by an intimation, had she let it be seen that she deemed them deficient in the quality of intimacy. She made her reflections, Isabel was sure; and she must have had a conviction that there were husbands and wives who were more intimate than that. But Pansy was not indiscreet even in thought; she would as little have ventured to judge her gentle stepmother as to criticise her magnificent father. Her heart may almost have stood still, as it would have done if she had seen two of the saints in the great picture in the convent-chapel turn their painted heads and shake them at each other; but as in this latter

case she would (for very solemnity's sake), never have mentioned the awful phenomenon, so she put away all knowledge of the secrets of larger lives than her own.

"You will be very far away," she said presently.

"Yes; I shall be far away. But it will scarcely matter," Isabel answered; "for so long as you are here I am very far away from you."

"Yes; but you can come and see me; though you have not come very often."

"I have not come because your father forbade it. To-day I bring nothing with me. I can't amuse you."

"I am not to be amused. That's not what papa wishes."

"Then it hardly matters whether I am in Rome or in England."

"You are not happy, Mrs. Osmond," said Pansy.

"Not very. But it doesn't matter."

"That's what I say to myself. What does it matter? But I should like to come out."

"I wish indeed you might."

"Don't leave me here," Pansy went on, gently.

Isabel was silent a moment; her heart beat fast.

"Will you come away with me now?" she asked.

Pansy looked at her pleadingly.

"Did papa tell you to bring me?"

"No; it's my own proposal."

"I think I had better wait, then. Did papa send me no message?"

"I don't think he knew I was coming."

"He thinks I have not had enough," said Pansy. "But I have. The ladies are very kind to me, and the little girls come to see me. There are some very little ones—such charming children. Then my room—you can see for yourself. All that is very delightful. But I have had enough. Papa wished me to think a little—and I have thought a great deal."

"What have you thought?"

"Well, that I must never displease papa."

"You knew that before."

"Yes; but I know it better. I will do anything—I will do anything," said Pansy. Then, as she heard her own words, a

deep, pure blush came into her face. Isabel read the meaning of it; she saw that the poor girl had been vanquished. It was well that Mr. Edward Rosier had kept his enamels! Isabel looked into her eyes and saw there mainly a prayer to be treated easily. She laid her hand on Pansy's, as if to let her know that her look conveyed no diminution of esteem; for the collapse of the girl's momentary resistance (mute and modest though it had been), seemed only her tribute to the truth of things. She didn't presume to judge others, but she had judged herself; she had seen the reality. She had no vocation for struggling with combinations; in the solemnity of sequestration there was something that overwhelmed her.

She bowed her pretty head to authority, and only asked of authority to be merciful. Yes; it was very well that Edward Rosier had reserved a few articles!

Isabel got up; her time was rapidly shortening.

"Good-bye, then," she said; "I leave Rome to-night."

Pansy took hold of her dress; there was a sudden change in the girl's face.

"You look strange; you frighten me."

"Oh, I am very harmless," said Isabel.

"Perhaps you won't come back?"

"Perhaps not. I can't tell."

"Ah, Mrs. Osmond, you won't leave me!"

Isabel now saw that she had guessed everything.

"My dear child, what can I do for you?" she asked.

"I don't know—but I am happier when I think of you."

"You can always think of me."

"Not when you are so far. I am a little afraid," said Pansy.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Of papa—a little. And of Madame Merle. She has just been to see me."

"You must not say that," Isabel observed.

"Oh, I will do everything they want. Only if you are here I shall do it more easily."

Isabel reflected a little.

"I won't desert you," she said at last. "Good-bye, my child."

Then they held each other a moment in a silent embrace, like two sisters; and afterwards Pansy walked along the corridor with her visitor to the top of the staircase.

"Madame Merle has been here," Pansy remarked as they went; and as Isabel answered nothing she added, abruptly, "I don't like Madame Merle!"

Isabel hesitated a moment; then she stopped.

"You must never say that—that you don't like Madame Merle."

Pansy looked at her in wonder; but wonder with Pansy had never been a reason for non-compliance.

"I never will again," she said, with exquisite gentleness.

At the top of the staircase they had to separate, as it appeared to be part of the mild but very definite discipline under which Pansy lived that she should not go down. Isabel descended, and when she reached the bottom the girl was standing above.

"You will come back?" she called out in a voice that Isabel remembered afterwards.

"Yes—I will come back."

Madame Catherine met Isabel below, and conducted her to the door of the parlour, outside of which the two stood talking a minute.

"I won't go in," said the good sister. "Madame Merle is waiting for you."

At this announcement Isabel gave a start, and she was on the point of asking if there were no other egress from the convent. But a moment's reflection assured her that she would do well not to betray to the worthy nun her desire to avoid Pansy's other visitor. Her companion laid her hand very gently on her arm, and fixing her a moment with a wise, benevolent eye, said to her, speaking French, almost familiarly—

"Eh bien, chère Madame, qu'en pensez-vous?"

"About my step-daughter? Oh, it would take long to tell you."

"We think it's enough," said Madame Catherine, significantly. And she pushed open the door of the parlour.

Madame Merle was sitting just as Isabel had left her, like a woman so absorbed in thought that she had not moved a

little-finger. As Madame Catherine closed the door behind Isabel, she got up, and Isabel saw that she had been thinking to some purpose. She had recovered her balance; she was in full possession of her resources.

"I found that I wished to wait for you," she said, urbanely. "But it's not to talk about Pansy."

Isabel wondered what it could be to talk about, and in spite of Madame Merle's declaration she answered after a moment—

"Madame Catherine says it's enough."

"Yes; it also seems to me enough. I wanted to ask you another word about poor Mr. Touchett," Madame Merle added. "Have you reason to believe that he is really at his last?"

"I have no information but a telegram. Unfortunately it only confirms a probability."

"I am going to ask you a strange question," said Madame Merle. "Are you very fond of your cousin?" And she gave a smile as strange as her question.

"Yes, I am very fond of him. But I don't understand you."

Madame Merle hesitated a moment.

"It is difficult to explain. Something has occurred to me which may not have occurred to you, and I give you the benefit of my idea. Your cousin did you once a great service. Have you never guessed it?"

"He has done me many services."

"Yes; but one was much above the rest. He made you a rich woman."

"*He* made me——?"

Madame Merle appeared to see herself successful, and she went on, more triumphantly—

"He imparted to you that extra lustre which was required to make you a brilliant match. At bottom, it is him that you have to thank." She stopped; there was something in Isabel's eyes.

"I don't understand you. It was my uncle's money."

"Yes; it was your uncle's money; but it was your cousin's idea. He brought his father over to it. Ah, my dear, the sum was large!"

Isabel stood staring; she seemed to-day to be living in a world illumined by lurid flashes.

"I don't know why you say such things! I don't know what you know."

"I know nothing but what I've guessed. But I have guessed that."

Isabel went to the door, and when she had opened it stood a moment with her hand on the latch. Then she said—it was her only revenge—

"I believed it was you I had to thank!"

Madame Merle dropped her eyes; she stood there in a kind of proud penance.

"You are very unhappy, I know. But I am more so."

"Yes; I can believe that. I think I should like never to see you again."

Madame Merle raised her eyes.

"I shall go to America," she announced, while Isabel passed out.

CHAPTER LIII

IT was not with surprise, it was with a feeling which in other circumstances would have had much of the effect of joy, that as Isabel descended from the Paris mail at Charing Cross, she stepped into the arms, as it were—or at any rate into the hands—of Henrietta Stackpole. She had telegraphed to her friend from Turin, and though she had not definitely said to herself that Henrietta would meet her, she had felt that her telegram would produce some helpful result. On her long journey from Rome her mind had been given up to vagueness; she was unable to question the future. She performed this journey with sightless eyes, and took little pleasure in the countries she traversed, decked out through they were in the richest freshness of spring. Her thoughts followed their course through other countries —strange-looking, dimly-lighted, pathless lands, in which there was no change of seasons, but only, as it seemed, a perpetual dreariness of winter. She had plenty to think about; but it was not reflection, nor conscious purpose, that filled her mind. Disconnected visions passed through it, and sudden dull gleams of memory, of expectation. The past and the future alternated at their will, but she saw them only in fitful images, which came and went by a logic of their own. It was extraordinary the things she remembered. Now that she was in the secret, now that she knew something that so much concerned her, and the eclipse of which had made life resemble an attempt to play whist with an imperfect pack of cards, the truth of things, their mutual relations, their meaning, and for the most part their horror rose before her with a kind of architectural vastness. She remembered a thousand trifles; they started to life with the spontaneity of a shiver. That is, she had thought them trifles at the time; now she saw that they were leaden-weighted. Yet even now they were trifles, after all; for of what use was it to her to understand them? Nothing

seemed of use to her to-day. All purpose, all intention, was suspended; all desire, too, save the single desire to reach her richly-constituted refuge. Gardencourt had been her starting-point, and to those muffled chambers it was at least a temporary solution to return. She had gone forth in her strength; she would come back in her weakness, and if the place had been a rest to her before, it would be a positive sanctuary now. She envied Ralph his dying; for if one were thinking of rest, that was the most perfect of all. To cease utterly, to give it all up and not know anything more—this idea was as sweet as the vision of a cool bath in a marble tank, in a darkened chamber, in a hot land. She had moments, indeed, in her journey from Rome, which were almost as good as being dead. She sat in her corner, so motionless, so passive, simply with the sense of being carried, so detached from hope and regret, that if her spirit was haunted with sudden pictures, it might have been the spirit disembarrassed of the flesh. There was nothing to regret now—that was all over. Not only the time of her folly, but the time of her repentance seemed far away. The only thing to regret was that Madame Merle had been so—so strange. Just here Isabel's imagination paused, from literal inability to say what it was that Madame Merle had been. Whatever it was, it was for Madame Merle herself to regret it; and doubtless she would do so in America, where she was going. It concerned Isabel no more; she only had an impression that she should never again see Madame Merle. This impression carried her into the future, of which from time to time she had a mutilated glimpse. She saw herself, in the distant years, still in the attitude of a woman who had her life to live, and these intimations contradicted the spirit of the present hour. It might be desirable to die; but this privilege was evidently to be denied her. Deep in her soul—deeper than any appetite for renunciation—was the sense that life would be her business for a long time to come. And at moments there was something inspiring, almost exhilarating, in the conviction. It was a proof of strength—it was a proof that she should some day be happy again. It couldn't be that she was to live only to suffer; she was still young, after all, and a

great many things might happen to her yet. To live only to suffer—only to feel the injury of life repeated and enlarged—it seemed to her that she was too valuable, too capable, for that. Then she wondered whether it were vain and stupid to think so well of herself. When had it ever been a guarantee to be valuable? Was not all history full of the destruction of precious things? Was it not much more probable that if one were delicate one would suffer? It involved then, perhaps, an admission that one had a certain grossness; but Isabel recognised, as it passed before her eyes, the quick, vague shadow of a long future. She should not escape; she should last. Then the middle years wrapped her about again, and the grey curtain of her indifference closed her in.

Henrietta kissed her, as Henrietta usually kissed, as if she were afraid she should be caught doing it; and then Isabel stood there in the crowd, looking about her, looking for her servant. She asked nothing; she wished to wait. She had a sudden perception that she should be helped. She was so glad Henrietta was there; there was something terrible in an arrival in London. The dusky, smoky, far-arching vault of the station, the strange, livid light, the dense, dark, pushing crowd, filled her with a nervous fear and made her put her arm into her friend's. She remembered that she had once liked these things; they seemed part of a mighty spectacle, in which there was something that touched her. She remembered how she walked away from Euston, in the winter dusk, in the crowded streets, five years before. She could not have done that to-day, and the incident came before her as the deed of another person.

"It's too beautiful that you should have come," said Henrietta, looking at her as if she thought Isabel might be prepared to challenge the proposition. "If you hadn't—if you hadn't; well, I don't know," remarked Miss Stackpole, hinting ominously at her powers of disapproval.

Isabel looked about, without seeing her maid. Her eyes rested on another figure, however, which she felt that she had seen before; and in a moment she recognised the genial countenance of Mr. Bantling. He stood a little apart, and

it was not in the power of the multitude that pressed about him to make him yield an inch of the ground he had taken—that of abstracting himself, discreetly, while the two ladies performed their embraces.

"There's Mr. Bantling," said Isabel, gently, irrelevantly, scarcely caring much now whether she should find her maid or not.

"Oh yes, he goes everywhere with me. Come here, Mr. Bantling!" Henrietta exclaimed. Whereupon the gallant bachelor advanced with a smile—a smile tempered, however, by the gravity of the occasion. "Isn't it lovely that she has come?" Henrietta asked. "He knows all about it," she added; "we had quite a discussion; he said you wouldn't; I said you would."

"I thought you always agreed," Isabel answered, smiling. She found she could smile now; she had seen in an instant, in Mr. Bantling's excellent eye, that he had good news for her. It seemed to say that he wished her to remember that he was an old friend of her cousin—that he understood—that it was all right. Isabel gave him her hand; she thought him so kind.

"Oh, I always agree," said Mr. Bantling. "But she doesn't, you know."

"Didn't I tell you that a maid was a nuisance?" Henrietta inquired. "Your young lady has probably remained at Calais."

"I don't care," said Isabel, looking at Mr. Bantling, whom she had never thought so interesting.

"Stay with her while I go and see," Henrietta commanded, leaving the two for a moment together.

They stood there at first in silence, and then Mr. Bantling asked Isabel how it had been on the Channel.

"Very fine. No, I think it was rather rough," said Isabel, to her companion's obvious surprise. After which she added, "You have been to Gardencourt, I know."

"Now how do you know that?"

"I can't tell you—except that you look like a person who has been there."

"Do you think I look sad? It's very sad there, you know."

"I don't believe you ever look sad. You look kind," said Isabel, with a frankness that cost her no effort. It seemed to her that she should never again feel a superficial embarrassment.

Poor Mr. Bantling, however, was still in this inferior stage. He blushed a good deal, and laughed, and assured her that he was often very blue, and that when he was blue he was awfully fierce.

"You can ask Miss Stackpole, you know," he said. "I was at Gardencourt two days ago."

"Did you see my cousin?"

"Only for a little. But he had been seeing people; Warburton was there the day before. Touchett was just the same as usual, except that he was in bed, that he looks tremendously ill, and that he can't speak," Mr. Bantling pursued. "He was immensely friendly all the same. He was just as clever as ever. It's awfully sad."

Even in the crowded, noisy station this simple picture was vivid. "Was that late in the day?"

"Yes; I went on purpose; we thought you would like to know."

"I am very much obliged to you. Can I go down to-night?"

"Ah, I don't think *she*'ll let you go," said Mr. Bantling. "She wants you to stop with her. I made Touchett's man promise to telegraph me to-day, and I found the telegram an hour ago at my club. 'Quiet and easy,' that's what it says, and it's dated two o'clock. So you see you can wait till to-morrow. You must be very tired."

"Yes, I am very tired. And I thank you again."

"Oh," said Mr. Bantling, "we were certain you would like the last news." While Isabel vaguely noted that after all he and Henrietta seemed to agree.

Miss Stackpole came back with Isabel's maid, whom she had caught in the act of proving her utility. This excellent person, instead of losing herself in the crowd, had simply attended to her mistress's luggage, so that now Isabel was at liberty to leave the station.

"You know you are not to think of going to the country to-night," Henrietta remarked to her. "It doesn't matter

whether there is a train or not. You are to come straight to me, in Wimpole Street. There isn't a corner to be had in London, but I have got you one all the same. It isn't a Roman palace, but it will do for a night."

"I will do whatever you wish," Isabel said.

"You will come and answer a few questions; that's what I wish."

"She doesn't say anything about dinner, does she, Mrs. Osmond?" Mr. Bantling inquired jocosely.

Henrietta fixed him a moment with her speculative gaze. "I see you are in a great hurry to get to your own. You will be at the Paddington station to-morrow morning at ten."

"Don't come for my sake, Mr. Bantling," said Isabel.

"He will come for mine," Henrietta declared, as she ushered Isabel into a cab.

Later, in a large, dusky parlour in Wimpole Street—to do her justice, there had been dinner enough—she asked Isabel those questions to which she had alluded at the station.

"Did your husband make a scene about your coming?" That was Miss Stackpole's first inquiry.

"No; I can't say he made a scene."

"He didn't object then?"

"Yes; he objected very much. But it was not what you would call a scene."

"What was it then?"

"It was a very quiet conversation."

Henrietta for a moment contemplated her friend.

"It must have been awful," she then remarked. And Isabel did not deny that it had been awful. But she confined herself to answering Henrietta's questions, which was easy, as they were tolerably definite. For the present she offered her no new information. "Well," said Miss Stackpole at last, "I have only one criticism to make. I don't see why you promised little Miss Osmond to go back."

"I am not sure that I see myself, now," Isabel replied. "But I did then."

"If you have forgotten your reason perhaps you won't return."

Isabel for a moment said nothing, then—

"Perhaps I shall find another," she rejoined.

"You will certainly never find a good one."

"In default of a better, my having promised will do," Isabel suggested.

"Yes; that's why I hate it."

"Don't speak of it now. I have a little time. Coming away was hard; but going back will be harder still."

"You must remember, after all, that he won't make a scene!" said Henrietta, with much intention.

"He will, though," Isabel answered gravely. "It will not be the scene of a moment; it will be a scene that will last always."

For some minutes the two women sat gazing at this prospect; and then Miss Stackpole, to change the subject, as Isabel had requested, announced abruptly—

"I have been to stay with Lady Pensil!"

"Ah, the letter came at last!"

"Yes; it took five years. But this time she wanted to see me."

"Naturally enough."

"It was more natural than I think you know," said Henrietta, fixing her eyes on a distant point. And then she added, turning suddenly: "Isabel Archer, I beg your pardon. You don't know why? Because I criticised you, and yet I have gone further than you. Mr. Osmond, at least, was born on the other side!"

It was a moment before Isabel perceived her meaning; it was so modestly, or at least so ingeniously, veiled. Isabel's mind was not possessed at present with the comicality of things; but she greeted with a quick laugh the image that her companion had raised. She immediately recovered herself, however, and with a gravity too pathetic to be real—

"Henrietta Stackpole," she asked, "are you going to give up your country?"

"Yes, my poor Isabel, I am. I won't pretend to deny it; I look the fact in the face. I am going to marry Mr. Bantling, and I am going to reside in London."

"It seems very strange," said Isabel, smiling now.

"Well yes, I suppose it does. I have come to it little by little. I think I know what I am doing; but I don't know that I can explain."

"One can't explain one's marriage," Isabel answered. "And yours doesn't need to be explained. Mr. Bantling is very good."

Henrietta said nothing; she seemed lost in reflection.

"He has a beautiful nature," she remarked at last. "I have studied him for many years, and I see right through him. He's as clear as glass—there's no mystery about him. He is not intellectual, but he appreciates intellect. On the other hand, he doesn't exaggerate its claims. I sometimes think we do in the United States."

"Ah," said Isabel, "you are changed indeed! It's the first time I have ever heard you say anything against your native land."

"I only say that we are too intellectual; that, after all, is a glorious fault. But I *am* changed; a woman has to change a good deal to marry."

"I hope you will be very happy. You will at last—over here—see something of the inner life."

Henrietta gave a little significant sigh. "That's the key to the mystery, I believe. I couldn't endure to be kept off. Now I have as good a right as any one!" she added, with artless elation.

Isabel was deeply diverted, but there was a certain melancholy in her view. Henrietta, after all, was human and feminine, Henrietta whom she had hitherto regarded as a light keen flame, a disembodied voice. It was rather a disappointment to find that she had personal susceptibilities, that she was subject to common passions, and that her intimacy with Mr. Bantling had not been completely original. There was a want of originality in her marrying him—there was even a kind of stupidity; and for a moment, to Isabel's sense, the dreariness of the world took on a deeper tinge.

A little later, indeed, she reflected that Mr. Bantling, after all, was original. But she didn't see how Henrietta could give up her country. She herself had relaxed her hold of it, but it had never been her country as it had been Hen-

rietta's. She presently asked her if she had enjoyed her visit to Lady Pensil.

"Oh, yes," said Henrietta, "she didn't know what to make of me."

"And was that very enjoyable?"

"Very much so, because she is supposed to be very talented. She thinks she knows everything; but she doesn't understand a lady-correspondent! It would be so much easier for her if I were only a little better or a little worse. She's so puzzled; I believe she thinks it's my duty to go and do something immoral. She thinks it's immoral that I should marry her brother; but, after all, that isn't immoral enough. And she will never understand—never!"

"She is not so intelligent as her brother, then," said Isabel. "He appears to have understood."

"Oh no, he hasn't!" cried Miss Stackpole, with decision. "I really believe that's what he wants to marry me for—just to find out. It's a fixed idea—a kind of fascination."

"It's very good in you to humour it,"

"Oh well," said Henrietta, "I have something to find out too!" And Isabel saw that she had not renounced an allegiance, but planned an attack. She was at last about to grapple in earnest with England.

Isabel also perceived, however, on the morrow, at the Paddington station, where she found herself, at two o'clock, in the company both of Miss Stackpole and Mr. Bantling, that the gentleman bore his perplexities lightly. If he had not found out everything, he had found out at least the great point—that Miss Stackpole would not be wanting in initiative. It was evident that in the selection of a wife he had been on his guard against this deficiency.

"Henrietta has told me, and I am very glad," Isabel said, as she gave him her hand.

"I dare say you think it's very odd," Mr. Bantling replied, resting on his neat umbrella.

"Yes, I think it's very odd."

"You can't think it's so odd as I do. But I have always rather liked striking out a line," said Mr. Bantling, serenely.

CHAPTER LIV

ISABEL'S arrival at Gardencourt on this second occasion was even quieter than it had been on the first. Ralph Touchett kept but a small household, and to the new servants Mrs. Osmond was a stranger; so that Isabel, instead of being conducted to her own apartment; was coldly shown into the drawing-room, and left to wait while her name was carried up to her aunt. She waited a long time; Mrs. Touchett appeared to be in no hurry to come to her. She grew impatient at last; she grew nervous and even frightened. The day was dark and cold; the dusk was thick in the corners of the wide brown rooms. The house was perfectly still—a stillness that Isabel remembered; it had filled all the place for days before the death of her uncle. She left the drawing-room and wandered about—strolled into the library and along the gallery of pictures, where, in the deep silence, her footstep made an echo. Nothing was changed; she recognised everything that she had seen years before; it might have been only yesterday that she stood there. She reflected that things change but little, while people change so much, and she became aware that she was walking about as her aunt had done on the day that she came to see her in Albany. She was changed enough since then—that had been the beginning. It suddenly struck her that if her Aunt Lydia had not come that day in just that way and found her alone, everything might have been different. She might have had another life, and to-day she might have been a happier woman. She stopped in the gallery in front of a small picture—a beautiful and valuable Boningtton—upon which her eyes rested for a long time. But she was not looking at the picture; she was wondering whether if her aunt had not come that day in Albany she would have married Caspar Goodwood.

Mrs. Touchett appeared at last, just after Isabel had returned to the big uninhabited drawing-room. She looked a

good deal older, but her eye was as bright as ever and her head as erect; her thin lips seemed a repository of latent meanings. She wore a little grey dress, of the most undecorated fashion, and Isabel wondered, as she had wondered the first time, whether her remarkable kinswoman resembled more a queen-regent or the matron of a gaol. Her lips felt very thin indeed as Isabel kissed her.

"I have kept you waiting because I have been sitting with Ralph," Mrs. Touchett said. "The nurse had gone to her lunch and I had taken her place. He has a man who is supposed to look after him, but the man is good for nothing; he is always looking out of the window—as if there were anything to see! I didn't wish to move, because Ralph seemed to be sleeping, and I was afraid the sound would disturb him. I waited till the nurse came back; I remembered that you knew the house."

"I find I know it better even than I thought; I have been walking," Isabel answered. And then she asked whether Ralph slept much.

"He lies with his eyes closed; he doesn't move. But I am not sure that it's always sleep."

"Will he see me? Can he speak to me?"

Mrs. Touchett hesitated a moment. "You can try him," she said. And then she offered to conduct Isabel to her room. "I thought they had taken you there; but it's not my house, it's Ralph's; and I don't know what they do. They must at least have taken your luggage; I don't suppose you have brought much. Not that I care, however. I believe they have given you the same room you had before; when Ralph heard you were coming he said you must have that one."

"Did he say anything else?"

"Ah, my dear, he doesn't chatter as he used!" cried Mrs. Touchett, as she preceded her niece up the staircase.

It was the same room, and something told Isabel that it had not been slept in since she occupied it. Her luggage was there, and it was not voluminous; Mrs. Touchett sat down a moment, with her eyes upon it.

"Is there really no hope?" Isabel asked, standing before her aunt.

"None whatever. There never has been. It has not been a successful life."

"No—it has only been a beautiful one," Isabel found herself already contradicting her aunt; she was irritated by her dryness.

"I don't know what you mean by that; there is no beauty without health. That is a very odd dress to travel in."

Isabel glanced at her garment. "I left Rome at an hour's notice; I took the first that came."

"Your sisters, in America, wished to know how you dress. That seemed to be their principal interest. I wasn't able to tell them—but they seemed to have the right idea; that you never wear anything less than black brocade."

"They think I am more brilliant than I am; I am afraid to tell them the truth," said Isabel. "Lily wrote me that you had dined with her."

"She invited me four times and I went once. After the second time she should have let me alone. The dinner was very good; it must have been expensive. Her husband has a very bad manner. Did I enjoy my visit to America? Why should I have enjoyed it? I didn't go for my pleasure."

These were interesting items, but Mrs. Touchett soon left her niece, whom she was to meet in half-an-hour at the mid-day meal. At this repast the two ladies faced each other at an abbreviated table in the melancholy dining-room. Here, after a little, Isabel saw that her aunt was not so dry as she appeared, and her old pity for the poor woman's inexpressiveness, her want to regret, of disappointment, came back to her. It seemed to her she would find it a blessing to-day to be able to indulge a regret. She wondered whether Mrs. Touchett were not trying, whether she had not a desire for the recreation of grief. On the other hand, perhaps, she was afraid; if she began to regret, it might take her too far. Isabel could perceive, however, that it had come over her that she had missed something, that she saw herself in the future as an old woman without memories. Her little sharp face looked tragical. She told her niece that Ralph as yet had not moved, but that he probably would be able to see her before dinner. And then in a moment she added that he had seen Lord Warburton the day before; an announcement

which startled Isabel a little, as it seemed an intimation that this personage was in the neighbourhood and that an accident might bring them together. Such an accident would not be happy; she had not come to England to converse with Lord Warburton. She presently said to her aunt that he had been very kind to Ralph; she had seen something of that in Rome.

"He has something else to think of now," Mrs. Touchett rejoined. And she paused, with a gaze like a gimlet.

Isabel saw that she meant something, and instantly guessed what she meant. But her reply concealed her guess; her heart beat faster, and she wished to gain a moment. "Ah yes —the House of Lords, and all that."

"He is not thinking of the Lords; he is thinking of the ladies. At least he is thinking of one of them; he told Ralph he was engaged to be married."

"Ah, to be married!" Isabel gently exclaimed.

"Unless he breaks it off. He seemed to think Ralph would like to know. Poor Ralph can't go to the wedding, though I believe it is to take place very soon."

"And who is the young lady?"

"A member of the aristocracy; Lady Flora, Lady Felicia— something of that sort."

"I am very glad," Isabel said. "It must be a sudden decision."

"Sudden enough, I believe; a courtship of three weeks. It has only just been made public."

"I am very glad," Isabel repeated, with a larger emphasis. She knew her aunt was watching her—looking for the signs of some curious emotion, and the desire to prevent her companion from seeing anything of this kind enabled her to speak in the tone of quick satisfaction—the tone, almost, of relief. Mrs. Touchett of course followed the tradition that ladies, even married ones, regard the marriage of their old lovers as an offence to themselves. Isabel's first care therefore was to show that however that might be in general, she was not offended now. But meanwhile, as I say, her heart beat faster; and if she sat for some moments thoughtful— she presently forgot Mrs. Touchett's observation—it was not because she had lost an admirer. Her imagination had traversed half Europe; it halted, panting, and even trembling

a little, in the city of Rome. She figured herself announcing to her husband that Lord Warburton was to lead a bride to the altar, and she was of course not aware how extremely sad she looked while she made this intellectual effort. But at last she collected herself, and said to her aunt—"He was sure to do it some time or other."

Mrs. Touchett was silent; then she gave a sharp little shake of the head. "Ah, my dear, you're beyond me!" she cried, suddenly. They went on with their luncheon in silence; Isabel felt as if she had heard of Lord Warburton's death. She had known him only as a suitor, and now that was all over.

He was dead for poor Pansy; by Pansy he might have lived. A servant had been hovering about; at last Mrs. Touchett requested him to leave them alone. She had finished her lunch; she sat with her hands folded on the edge of the table. "I should like to ask you three questions," she said to Isabel, when the servant had gone.

"Three are a great many."

"I can't do with less; I have been thinking. They are all very good ones."

"That's what I am afraid of. The best questions are the worst," Isabel answered. Mrs. Touchett had pushed back her chair, and Isabel left the table and walked, rather consciously, to one of the deep windows, while her aunt followed her with her eyes.

"Have you ever been sorry you didn't marry Lord Warburton?" Mrs. Touchett inquired.

Isabel shook her head slowly, smiling. "No, dear aunt."

"Good. I ought to tell you that I propose to believe what you say."

"Your believing me is an immense temptation," Isabel replied, smiling still.

"A temptation to lie? I don't recommend you to do that, for when I'm misinformed I'm as dangerous as a poisoned rat. I don't mean to crow over you."

"It is my husband that doesn't get on with me," said Isabel.

"I could have told him that. I don't call that crowing over *you*," Mrs. Touchett added. "Do you still like Serena Merle?" she went on.

"Not as I once did. But it doesn't matter, for she is going to America."

"To America? She must have done something very bad."

"Yes—very bad."

"May I ask what it is?"

"She made a convenience of me."

"Ah," cried Mrs. Touchett, "so she did of me! She does of every one."

"She will make a convenience of America," said Isabel, smiling again, and glad that her aunt's questions were over.

It was not till the evening that she was able to see Ralph. He had been dozing all day; at least he had been lying unconscious. The doctor was there, but after a while he went away; the local doctor, who had attended his father, and whom Ralph liked. He came three or four times a day; he was deeply interested in his patient. Ralph had had Sir Matthew Hope, but he had got tired of this celebrated man, to whom he had asked his mother to send word that he was now dead, and was therefore without further need of medical advice. Mrs. Touchett had simply written to Sir Matthew that her son disliked him. On the day of Isabel's arrival Ralph gave no sign, as I have related, for many hours; but towards evening he raised himself and said he knew that she had come. How he knew it was not apparent; inasmuch as, for fear of exciting him, no one had offered the information. Isabel came in and sat by his bed in the dim light; there was only a shaded candle in a corner of the room. She told the nurse that she might go—that she herself would sit with him for the rest of the evening. He had opened his eyes and recognised her, and had moved his hand, which lay very helpless beside him, so that she might take it. But he was unable to speak; he closed his eyes again and remained perfectly still, only keeping her hand in his own. She sat with him a long time—till the nurse came back; but he gave no further sign. He might have passed away while she looked at him; he was already the figure and pattern of death. She had thought him far gone in Rome, but this was worse; there was only one change possible now. There was a strange tranquillity in his face; it was as still as the lid of a box. With this, he was a mere lattice of bones; when he

opened his eyes to greet her, it was as if she were looking into immeasurable space. It was not till midnight that the nurse came back; but the hours, to Isabel, had not seemed long; it was exactly what she had come for. If she had come simply to wait, she found ample occasion, for he lay for three days in a kind of grateful silence. He recognised her, and at moments he seemed to wish to speak; but he found no voice. Then he closed his eyes again, as if he too were waiting for something—for something that certainly would come. He was so absolutely quiet that it seemed to her what was coming had already arrived; and yet she never lost the sense that they were still together. But they were not always together; there were other hours that she passed in wandering through the empty house and listening for a voice that was not poor Ralph's. She had a constant fear; she thought it possible her husband would write to her. But he remained silent, and she only got a letter from Florence from the Countess Gemini. Ralph, however, spoke at last, on the evening of the third day.

"I feel better to-night," he murmured, abruptly, in the soundless dimness of her vigil; "I think I can say something."

She sank upon her knees beside his pillow; took his thin hand in her own; begged him not to make an effort—not to tire himself.

His face was of necessity serious—it was incapable of the muscular play of a smile; but its owner apparently had not lost a perception of incongruities. "What does it matter if I am tired, when I have all eternity to rest?" he asked. "There is no harm in making an effort when it is the very last. Don't people always feel better just before the end? I have often heard of that; it's what I was waiting for. Ever since you have been here; I thought it would come. I tried two or three times; I was afraid you would get tired of sitting there." He spoke slowly, with painful breaks and long pauses, his voice seemed to come from a distance. When he ceased, he lay with his face turned to Isabel, and his large unwinking eyes open into her own. "It was very good of you to come," he went on. "I thought you would; but I wasn't sure."

"I was not sure either, till I came," said Isabel.

"You have been like an angel beside my bed. You know they talk about the angel of death. It's the most beautiful of all. You have been like that; as if you were waiting for me."

"I was not waiting for your death; I was waiting for—for this. This is not death, dear Ralph."

"Not for you—no. There is nothing makes us feel so much alive as to see others die. That's the sensation of life—the sense that we remain. I have had it—even I. But now I am of no use but to give it to others. With me it's all over." And then he paused. Isabel bowed her head further, till it rested on the two hands that were clasped upon his own. She could not see him now; but his far-away voice was close to her ear. "Isabel," he went on, suddenly, "I wish it were over for you." She answered nothing; she had burst into sobs; she remained so, with her buried face. He lay silent, listening to her sobs; at last he gave a long groan. "Ah, what is it you have done for me?"

"What is it you did for me?" she cried, her now extreme agitation half smothered by her attitude. She had lost all her shame, all wish to hide things. Now he might know; she wished him to know, for it brought them supremely together, and he was beyond the reach of pain. "You did something once—you know it. Oh Ralph, you have been everything! What have I done for you—what can I do to-day? I would die if you could live. But I don't wish you to live; I would die myself, not to lose you." Her voice was as broken as his own, and full of tears and anguish.

"You won't lose me—you will keep me. Keep me in your heart; I shall be nearer to you than I have ever been. Dear Isabel, life is better; for in life there is love. Death is good—but there is no love."

"I never thanked you—I never spoke—I never was what I should be!" Isabel went on. She felt a passionate need to cry out and accuse herself, to let her sorrow possess her. All her troubles, for the moment, became single and melted together into this present pain. "What must you have thought of me? Yet how could I know? I never knew,

and I only know to-day because there are people less stupid than I."

"Don't mind people," said Ralph. "I think I am glad to leave people."

She raised her head and her clapsed hands; she seemed for a moment to pray to him.

"Is it true—is it true?" she asked.

"True that you have been stupid? Oh no," said Ralph, with a sensible intention of wit.

"That you made me rich—that all I have is yours?"

He turned away his head, and for some time said nothing. Then at last—

"Ah, don't speak of that—that was not happy." Slowly he moved his face toward her again, and they once more saw each other. "But for that—but for that—" And he paused. "I believe I ruined you," he added softly.

She was full of the sense that he was beyond the reach of pain; he seemed already so little of this world. But even if she had not had it she would still have spoken, for nothing mattered now but the only knowledge that was not pure anguish—the knowledge that they were looking at the truth together.

"He married me for my money," she said.

She wished to say everything; she was afraid he might die before she had done so.

He gazed at her a little, and for the first time his fixed eyes lowered their lids. But he raised them in a moment, and then—

"He was greatly in love with you," he answered.

"Yes, he was in love with me. But he would not have married me if I had been poor. I don't hurt you in saying that. How can I? I only want you to understand. I always tried to keep you from understanding; but that's all over."

"I always understood," said Ralph.

"I thought you did, and I didn't like it. But now I like it."

"You don't hurt me—you make me very happy." And as Ralph said this there was an extraordinary gladness in his voice. She bent her head again, and pressed her lips to the

back of his hand. "I always understood," he continued, "though it was so strange—so pitiful. You wanted to look at life for yourself—but you were not allowed; you were punished for your wish. You were ground in the very mill of the conventional!"

"Oh yes, I have been punished," Isabel sobbed.

He listened to her a little, and then continued—

"Was he very bad about your coming?"

"He made it very hard for me. But I don't care."

"It is all over, then, between you?"

"Oh no; I don't think anything is over."

"Are you going back to him?" Ralph stammered.

"I don't know—I can't tell. I shall stay here as long as I may. I don't want to think—I needn't think. I don't care for anything but you, and that is enough for the present. It will last a little yet. Here on my knees, with you dying in my arms, I am happier than I have been for a long time. And I want you to be happy—not to think of anything sad; only to feel that I am near you and I love you. Why should there be pain? In such hours as this what have we to do with pain? That is not the deepest thing; there is something deeper."

Ralph evidently found, from moment to moment, greater difficulty in speaking; he had to wait longer to collect himself. At first he appeared to make no response to these last words; he let a long time elapse. Then he murmured simply—

"You must stay here."

"I should like to stay, as long as seems right."

"As seems right—as seems right?" He repeated her words. "Yes, you think a great deal about that."

"Of course one must. You are very tired," said Isabel.

"I am very tired. You said just now that pain is not the deepest thing. No—no. But it is very deep. If I could stay——"

"For me you will always be here," she softly interrupted. It was easy to interrupt him.

But he went on, after a moment—

"It passes, after all; it's passing now. But love remains. I don't know why we should suffer so much. Perhaps I

shall find out. There are many things in life; you are very young."

"I feel very old," said Isabel.

"You will grow young again. That's how I see you. I don't believe—I don't believe——" And he stopped again; his strength failed him.

She begged him to be quiet now. "We needn't speak to understand each other," she said.

"I don't believe that such a generous mistake as yours—can hurt you for more than a little."

"Oh, Ralph, I am very happy now," she cried, through her tears.

"And remember this," he continued, "that if you have been hated, you have also been loved."

"Ah, my brother!" she cried, with a movement of still deeper prostration.

CHAPTER LV

HE had told her, the first evening she ever spent at Gardencourt, that if she should live to suffer enough she might some day see the ghost with which the old house was duly provided. She apparently had fulfilled the necessary condition; for the next morning, in the cold, faint dawn, she knew that a spirit was standing by her bed. She had lain down without undressing, for it was her belief that Ralph would not outlast the night. She had no inclination to sleep; she was waiting, and such waiting was wakeful. But she closed her eyes; she believed that as the night wore on she should hear a knock at her door. She heard no knock, but at the time the darkness began vaguely to grow grey, she started up from her pillow as abruptly as if she had received a summons. It seemed to her for an instant that Ralph was standing there—a dim, hovering figure in the dimness of the room. She stared a moment; she saw his white face—his kind eyes; then she saw there was nothing. She was not afraid; she was only sure. She went out of her room, and in her certainty passed through dark corridors and down a flight of oaken steps that shone in the vague light of a hall-window. Outside of Ralph's door she stopped a moment, listening; but she seemed to hear only the hush that filled it. She opened the door with a hand as gentle as if she were lifting a veil from the face of the dead, and saw Mrs. Touchett sitting motionless and upright beside the couch of her son, with one of his hands in her own. The doctor was on the other side, with poor Ralph's further wrist resting in his professional fingers. The nurse was at the foot, between them. Mrs. Touchett took no notice of Isabel, but the doctor looked at her very hard; then he gently placed Ralph's hand in a proper position, close beside him. The nurse looked at her very hard too, and no one said a word; but Isabel only looked at what she had come to see. It was fairer than Ralph had ever been in life,

and there was a strange resemblance to the face of his father, which, six years before, she had seen lying on the same pillow. She went to her aunt and put her arm round her; and Mrs. Touchett, who as a general thing neither invited nor enjoyed caresses, submitted for a moment to this one, rising, as it were, to take it. But she was stiff and dry-eyed; her acute white face was terrible.

"Poor Aunt Lydia," Isabel murmured.

"Go and thank God you have no child," said Mrs. Touchett, disengaging herself.

Three days after this a considerable number of people found time, in the height of the London "season," to take a morning train down to a quiet station in Berkshire and spend half-an-hour in a small grey church, which stood within an easy walk. It was in the green burial-place of this edifice that Mrs. Touchett consigned her son to earth. She stood herself at the edge of the grave, and Isabel stood beside her; the sexton himself had not a more practical interest in the scene than Mrs. Touchett. It was a solemn occasion, but it was not a disagreeable one; there was a certain geniality in the appearance of things. The weather had changed to fair; the day, one of the last of the treacherous May-time, was warm and windless, and the air had the brightness of the hawthorn and the blackbird. If it was sad to think of poor Touchett, it was not too sad, since death, for him, had had no violence. He had been dying so long; he was so ready; everything had been so expected and prepared. There were tears in Isabel's eyes, but they were not tears that blinded. She looked through them at the beauty of the day, the splendour of nature, the sweetness of the old English churchyard, the bowed heads of good friends. Lord Warburton was there, and a group of gentlemen unknown to Isabel, several of whom, as she afterwards learned, were connected with the bank; and there were others whom she knew. Miss Stackpole was among the first, with honest Mr. Bantling beside her; and Caspar Goodwood, lifting his head higher than the rest—bowing it rather less. During much of the time Isabel was conscious of Mr. Goodwood's gaze; he looked at her somewhat harder than he usually looked in public, while the others had fixed their eyes upon

the churchyard turf. But she never let him see that she saw him; she thought of him only to wonder that he was still in England. She found that she had taken for granted that after accompanying Ralph to Gardencourt he had gone away; she remembered that it was not a country that pleased him. He was there, however, very distinctly there; and something in his attitude seemed to say that he was there with a complex intention. She would not meet his eyes, though there was doubtless sympathy in them; he made her rather uneasy. With the dispersal of the little group he disappeared, and the only person who came to speak to her—though several spoke to Mrs. Touchett—was Henrietta Stackpole. Henrietta had been crying.

Ralph had said to Isabel that he hoped she would remain at Gardencourt, and she made no immediate motion to leave the place. She said to herself that it was but common charity to stay a little with her aunt. It was fortunate she had so good a formula; otherwise she might have been greatly in want of one. Her errand was over; she had done what she left her husband for. She had a husband in a foreign city, counting the hours of her absence; in such a case one needed an excellent motive. He was not one of the best husbands; but that didn't alter the case. Certain obligations were involved in the very fact of marriage, and were quite independent of the quantity of enjoyment extracted from it. Isabel thought of her husband as little as might be; but now that she was at a distance, beyond its spell, she thought with a kind of spiritual shudder of Rome. There was a deadly sadness in the thought, and she drew back into the deepest shade of Gardencourt. She lived from day to day, postponing, closing her eyes, trying not to think. She knew she must decide, but she decided nothing; her coming itself had not been a decision. On that occasion she had simply started. Osmond gave no sound, and now evidently he would give none; he would leave it all to her. From Pansy she heard nothing, but that was very simple; her father had told her not to write.

Mrs. Touchett accepted Isabel's company, but offered her no assistance; she appeared to be absorbed in considering, without enthusiasm, but with perfect lucidity, the new con-

veniences of her own situation. Mrs. Touchett was not an optimist, but even from painful occurrences she managed to extract a certain satisfaction. This consisted in the reflection that, after all, such things happened to other people and not to herself. Death was disagreeable, but in this case it was her son's death, not her own; she had never flattered herself that her own would be disagreeable to any one but Mrs. Touchett. She was better off than poor Ralph, who had left all the commodities of life behind him, and indeed all the security; for the worst of dying was, to Mrs. Touchett's mind, that it exposed one to be taken advantage of. For herself, she was on the spot; there was nothing so good as that. She made known to Isabel very punctually—it was the evening her son was buried—several of Ralph's testamentary arrangements. He had told her everything, had consulted her about everything. He left her no money; of course she had no need of money. He left her the furniture of Gardencourt, exclusive of the pictures and books, and the use of the place for a year; after which it was to be sold. The money produced by the sale was to constitute an endowment for a hospital for poor persons suffering from the malady of which he died; and of this portion of the will Lord Warburton was appointed executor. The rest of his property, which was to be withdrawn from the bank, was disposed of in various bequests, several of them to those cousins in Vermont to whom his father had already been so bountiful. Then there were a number of small legacies.

"Some of them are extremely peculiar," said Mrs. Touchett; "he has left considerable sums to persons I never heard of. He gave me a list, and I asked then who some of them were, and he told me they were people who at various times had seemed to like him. Apparently he thought you didn't like him, for he has not left you a penny. It was his opinion that you were handsomely treated by his father, which I am bound to say I think you were—though I don't mean that I ever heard him complain of it. The pictures are to be dispersed; he has distributed them about, one by one, as little keepsakes. The most valuable of the collection goes to Lord Warburton. And what do you think he has done with his

library? It sounds like a practical joke. He has left it to your friend Miss Stackpole—'in recognition of her services to literature.' Does he mean her following him up from Rome? Was that a service to literature? It contains a great many rare and valuable books, and as she can't carry it about the world in her trunk, he recommends her to sell it at auction. She will sell it of course at Christie's and with the proceeds she will set up a newspaper. Will that be a service to literature?"

This question Isabel forbore to answer, as it exceeded the little interrogatory to which she had deemed it necessary to submit on her arrival. Besides, she had never been less interested in literature than to-day, as she found when she occasionally took down from the shelf one of the rare and valuable volumes of which Mrs. Touchett had spoken. She was quite unable to read; her attention had never been so little at her command. One afternoon, in the library, about a week after the ceremony in the churchyard, she was trying to fix it a little; but her eyes often wandered from the book in her hand to the open window, which looked down the long avenue. It was in this way that she saw a modest vehicle approach the door, and perceived Lord Warburton sitting, in rather an uncomfortable attitude, in a corner of it. He had always had a high standard of courtesy, and it was therefore not remarkable, under the circumstances, that he should have taken the trouble to come down from London to call upon Mrs. Touchett. It was of course Mrs. Touchett that he had come to see, and not Mrs. Osmond; and to prove to herself the validity of this theory, Isabel presently stepped out of the house and wandered away into the park. Since her arrival at Gardencourt she had been but little out of doors, the weather being unfavourable for visiting the grounds. This evening, however, was fine, and at first it struck her as a happy thought to have come out. The theory I have just mentioned was plausible enough, but it brought her little rest, and if you had seen her pacing about, you would have said she had a bad conscience. She was not pacified when at the end of a quarter of an hour, finding herself in view of the house, she saw Mrs. Touchett emerge from the portico, accompanied by her visitor. Her aunt had evidently proposed to

Lord Warburton that they should come in search of her. She was in no humour for visitors, and if she had had time she would have drawn back, behind one of the great trees. But she saw that she had been seen and that nothing was left her but to advance. As the lawn at Gardencourt was a vast expanse, this took some time; during which she observed that, as he walked beside his hostess, Lord Warburton kept his hands rather stiffly behind him and his eyes upon the ground. Both persons apparently were silent; but Mrs. Touchett's thin little glance, as she directed it toward Isabel; had even at a distance an expression. It seemed to say, with cutting sharpness, "Here is the eminently amenable nobleman whom you might have married!" When Lord Warburton lifted his own eyes, however, that was not what they said. They only said, "This is rather awkward, you know, and I depend upon you to help me." He was very grave, very proper, and for the first time since Isabel had known him, he greeted her without a smile. Even in his days of distress he had always begun with a smile. He looked extremely self-conscious.

"Lord Warburton has been so good as to come out to see me," said Mrs. Touchett. "He tells me he didn't know you were still here. I know he's an old friend of yours, and as I was told you were not in the house, I brought him out to see for himself."

"Oh, I saw there was a good train at 6.40, that would get me back in time for dinner," Mrs. Touchett's companion explained, rather irrelevantly. "I am so glad to find you have not gone."

"I am not here for long, you know," Isabel said, with a certain eagerness.

"I suppose not; but I hope it's for some weeks. You came to England sooner than—a—than you thought?"

"Yes, I came very suddenly."

Mrs. Touchett turned away, as if she were looking at the condition of the grounds, which indeed was not what it should be; while Lord Warburton hesitated a little. Isabel fancied he had been on the point of asking about her husband—rather confusedly—and then had checked himself. He continued immitigably grave, either because he thought it be-

coming in a place over which death had just passed, or for more personal reasons. If he was conscious of personal reasons, it was very fortunate that he had the cover of the former motive; he could make the most of that. Isabel thought of all this. It was not that his face was sad, for that was another matter; but it was strangely inexpressive.

"My sisters would have been so glad to come if they had known you were still here—if they had thought you would see them," Lord Warburton went on. "Do kindly let them see you before you leave England."

"It would give me great pleasure; I have such a friendly recollection of them."

"I don't know whether you would come to Lockleigh for a day or two? You know there is always that old promise?" And his lordship blushed a little as he made this suggestion, which gave his face a somewhat more familiar air. "Perhaps I'm not right in saying that just now; of course you are not thinking of visiting. But I meant what would hardly be a visit. My sisters are to be at Lockleigh at Whitsuntide for three days; and if you could come then—as you say you are not to be very long in England—I would see that there should be literally no one else."

Isabel wondered whether not even the young lady he was to marry would be there with her mamma; but she did not express this idea. "Thank you extremely," she contented herself with saying; "I'm afraid I hardly know about Whitsuntide."

"But I have your promise—haven't I?—for some other time."

There was an interrogation in this; but Isabel let it pass. She looked at her interlocutor a moment, and the result of her observation was that—as had happened before—she felt sorry for him. "Take care you don't miss your train," she said. And then she added, "I wish you every happiness."

He blushed again, more than before, and he looked at his watch.

"Ah yes, 6.40; I haven't much time, but I have a fly at the door. Thank you very much." It was not apparent whether the thanks applied to her having reminded him of his train, or to the more sentimental remark. "Good-bye, Mrs. Os-

mond; good-bye." He shook hands with her, without meeting her eye, and then he turned to Mrs. Touchett, who had wandered back to them. With her his parting was equally brief; and in a moment the two ladies saw him move with long steps across the lawn.

"Are you very sure he is to be married?" Isabel asked of her aunt.

"I can't be surer than he; but he seems sure. I congratulated him, and he accepted it."

"Ah," said Isabel, "I give it up!"—while her aunt returned to the house and to those avocations which the visitor had interrupted.

She gave it up, but she still thought of it—thought of it while she strolled again under the great oaks whose shadows were long upon the acres of turf. At the end of a few minutes she found herself near a rustic bench, which, a moment after she had looked at it, struck her as an object recognised. It was not simply that she had seen it before, nor even that she had sat upon it; it was that in this spot something important had happened to her—that the place had an air of association. Then she remembered that she had been sitting there six years before, when a servant brought her from the house the letter in which Caspar Goodwood informed her that he had followed her to Europe; and that when she had read that letter she looked up to hear Lord Warburton announcing that he should like to marry her. It was indeed an historical, an interesting, bench; she stood and looked at it as if it might have something to say to her. She would not sit down on it now—she felt rather afraid of it. She only stood before it, and while she stood, the past came back to her in one of those rushing waves of emotion by which people of sensibility are visited at odd hours. The effect of this agitation was a sudden sense of being very tired, under the influence of which she overcame her scruples and sank into the rustic seat. I have said that she was restless and unable to occupy herself; and whether or no, if you had seen her there, you would have admired the justice of the former epithet, you would at least have allowed that at this moment she was the image of a victim of idleness. Her attitude had a singular absence of purpose; her hands, hanging at

her sides, lost themselves in the folds of her black dress; her eyes gazed vaguely before her. There was nothing to recall her to the house, the two ladies, in their seclusion, dined early and had tea at an indefinite hour. How long she had sat in this position she could not have told you; but the twilight had grown thick when she became aware that she was not alone. She quickly straightened herself, glancing about, and then saw what had become of her solitude. She was sharing it with Caspar Goodwood, who stood looking at her, a few feet off, and whose footfall, on the unresonant turf, as he came near, she had not heard. It occurred to her, in the midst of this, that it was just so Lord Warburton had surprised her of old.

She instantly rose, and as soon as Goodwood saw that he was seen he started forward. She had had time only to rise, when with a motion that looked like violence, but felt like—she knew not what—he grasped her by the wrist and made her sink again into the seat. She closed her eyes; he had not hurt her, it was only a touch that she had obeyed. But there was something in his face that she wished not to see. That was the way he had looked at her the other day in the churchyard; only to-day it was worse. He said nothing at first; she only felt him close to her. It almost seemed to her that no one had ever been so close to her as that. All this, however, took but a moment, at the end of which she had disengaged her wrist, turning her eyes upon her visitant.

"You have frightened me," she said.

"I didn't mean to," he answered, "but if I did a little, no matter. I came from London a while ago by the train, but I couldn't come here directly. There was a man at the station who got ahead of me. He took a fly that was there, and I heard him give the order to drive here. I don't know who he was, but I didn't want to come with him; I wanted to see you alone. So I have been waiting and walking about. I have walked all over, and I was just coming to the house when I saw you here. There was a keeper, or some one, who met me; but that was all right, because I had made his acquaintance when I came here with your cousin. Is that gentleman gone? are you really alone? I want to speak to

you." Goodwood spoke very fast; he was as excited as when they parted in Rome. Isabel had hoped that condition would subside; and she shrank into herself as she perceived that, on the contrary he had only let out sail. She had a new sensation; he had never produced it before; it was a feeling of danger. There was indeed something awful in his persistency. Isabel gazed straight before her; he with a hand on each knee, leaned forward, looking deeply into her face. The twilight seemed to darken around them. "I want to speak to you," he repeated; "I have something particular to say. I don't want to trouble you—as I did the other day, in Rome. That was no use; it only distressed you. I couldn't help it; I knew I was wrong. But I am not wrong now; please don't think I am," he went on, with his hard, deep voice melting a moment into entreaty. "I came here to-day for a purpose! it's very different. It was no use for me to speak to you then; but now I can help you."

She could not have told you whether it was because she was afraid, or because such a voice in the darkness seemed of necessity a boon; but she listened to him as she had never listened before; his words dropped deep into her soul. They produced a sort of stillness in all her being; and it was with an effort, in a moment, that she answered him.

"How can you help me?" she asked, in a low tone; as if she were taking what he had said seriously enough to make the inquiry in confidence.

"By inducing you to trust me. Now I know—to-day I know.—Do you remember what I asked you in Rome? Then I was quite in the dark. But to-day I know on good authority; everything is clear to me to-day. It was a good thing, when you made me come away with your cousin. He was a good fellow—he was a noble fellow—he told me how the case stands. He explained everything; he guessed what I thought of you. He was a member of your family, and he left you—so long as you should be in England—to my care," said Goodwood, as if he were making a great point. "Do you know what he said to me the last time I saw him—as he lay there where he died? He said—'Do everything you can for her; do everything she will let you.'"

Isabel suddenly got up. "You had no business to talk about me!"

"Why not—why not, when we talked in that way?" he demanded, following her fast. "And he was dying—when a man's dying it's different. She checked the movement she had made to leave him; she was listening more than ever; it was true that he was not the same as that last time. That had been aimless, fruitless passion; but at present he had an idea. Isabel scented his idea in all her being. "But it doesn't matter!" he exclaimed, pressing her close, though now without touching a hem of her garment. If Touchett had never opened his mouth, I should have known all the same. I had only to look at you at your cousin's funeral to see what's the matter with you. You can't deceive me any more; for God's sake be honest with a man who is so honest with you. You are the most unhappy of women, and your husband's a devil!"

She turned on him as if he had struck her. "Are you mad?" she cried.

"I have never been so sane; I see the whole thing. Don't think it's necessary to defend him. But I won't say another word against him; I will speak only of you," Goodwood added, quickly. "How can you pretend you are not heartbroken? You don't know what to do—you don't know where to turn. It's too late to play a part; didn't you leave all that behind you in Rome? Touchett knew all about it—and I knew it too—what it would cost you to come here. It will cost you your life? When I know that, how can I keep myself from wishing to save you? What would you think of me if I should stand still and see you go back to your reward? 'It's awful, what she'll have to pay for it!'—that's what Touchett said to me. I may tell you that, mayn't I? He was such a near relation!" cried Goodwood, making his point again. "I would sooner have been shot than let another man say those things to me; but he was different; he seemed to me to have the right. It was after he got home—when he saw he was dying, and when I saw it too. I understand all about it: you are afraid to go back. You are perfectly alone; you don't know where to turn. Now it is that I want you to think of me."

"To think of you?" Isabel said, standing before him in the dusk. The idea of which she had caught a glimpse a few moments before now loomed large. She threw back her head a little; she stared at it as if it had been a comet in the sky.

"You don't know where to turn; turn to me! I want to persuade you to trust me," Goodwood repeated. And then he paused a moment, with his shining eyes. "Why should you go back—why should you go through that ghastly form?"

"To get away from you!" she answered. But this expressed only a little of what she felt. The rest was that she had never been loved before. It wrapped her about; it lifted her off her feet.

At first, in rejoinder to what she had said, it seemed to her that he would break out into greater violence. But after an instant he was perfectly quiet; he wished to prove that he was sane, that he had reasoned it all out. "I wish to prevent that, and I think I may, if you will only listen to me. It's too monstrous to think of sinking back into that misery. It's you that are out of your mind. Trust me as if I had the care of you. Why shouldn't we be happy—when it's here before us, when it's so easy? I am yours for ever—for ever and ever. Here I stand; I'm as firm as a rock. What have you to care about? You have no children; that perhaps would be an obstacle. As it is, you have nothing to consider. You must save what you can of your life; you mustn't lose it all simply because you have lost a part. It would be an insult to you to assume that you care for the look of the thing—for what people will say—for the bottomless idiocy of the world! We have nothing to do with all that; we are quite out of it; we look at things as they are. You took the great step in coming away; the next is nothing; it's the natural one. I swear, as I stand here, that a woman deliberately made to suffer is justified in anything in life—in going down into the streets, if that will help her! I know how you suffer, and that's why I am here. We can do absolutely as we please; to whom under the sun do we owe anything? What is it that holds us—what is it that has the smallest right to interfere in such

a question as this? Such a question is between ourselves—and to say that is to settle it! Were we born to rot in our misery—were we born to be afraid? I never knew *you* afraid! If you only trust me, how little you will be disappointed! The world is all before us—and the world is very large. I know something about that."

Isabel gave a long murmur, like a creature in pain; it was as if he were pressing something that hurt her. "The world is very small," she said, at random; she had an immense desire to appear to resist. She said it at random, to hear herself say something; but it was not what she meant. The world, in truth, had never seemed so large; it seemed to open out, all round her, to take the form of a mighty sea, where she floated in fathomless waters. She had wanted help, and here was help; it had come in a rushing torrent. I know not whether she believed everything that he said; but she believed that to let him take her in his arms would be the next best thing to dying. This belief, for a moment, was a kind of rapture, in which she felt herself sinking and sinking. In the movement she seemed to beat with her feet, in order to catch herself, to feel something to rest on.

"Ah, be mine as I am yours!" she heard her companion cry. He had suddenly given up argument, and his voice seemed to come through a confusion of sound.

This however, of course, was but a subjective fact, as the metaphysicians say; the confusion, the noise of waters, and all the rest of it, were in her own head. In an instant she became aware of this. "Do me the greatest kindness of all," she said. "I beseech you to go away!"

"Ah, don't say that. Don't kill me!" he cried.

She clasped her hands; her eyes were streaming with tears.

"As you love me, as you pity me, leave me alone!"

He glared at her a moment through the dusk, and the next instant she felt his arms about her, and his lips on her own lips. His kiss was like a flash of lightning; when it was dark again she was free. She never looked about her; she only darted away from the spot. There were lights in the windows of the house; they shone far across the lawn. In an extraordinarily short time—for the distance was con-

siderable—she had moved through the darkness (for she saw nothing) and reached the door. Here only she paused. She looked all about her; she listened a little; then she put her hand on the latch. She had not known where to turn; but she knew now. There was a very straight path.

Two days afterwards, Caspar Goodwood knocked at the door of the house in Wimpole Street in which Henrietta Stackpole occupied furnished lodgings. He had hardly removed his hand from the knocker when the door was opened, and Miss Stackpole herself stood before him. She had on her bonnet and jacket; she was on the point of going out.

"Oh, good morning," he said, "I was in hope I should find Mrs. Osmond."

Henrietta kept him waiting a moment for her reply; but there was a good deal of expression about Miss Stackpole even when she was silent.

"Pray what led you to suppose she was here?"

"I went down to Gardencourt this morning, and the servant told me she had come to London. He believed she was to come to you."

Again Miss Stackpole held him—with an intention of perfect kindness—in suspense.

"She came here yesterday, and spent the night. But this morning she started for Rome."

Caspar Goodwood was not looking at her; his eyes were fastened on the doorstep.

"Oh, she started—" he stammered. And without finishing his phrase, or looking up, he turned away.

Henrietta had come out, closing the door behind her, and now she put out her hand and grasped his arm.

"Look here, Mr. Goodwood," she said; "just you wait!"

On which he looked up at her.